Mind the backlash: Gender discrimination and sexism in contemporary societies

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Mind the backlash: Gender discrimination and sexism in contemporary societies

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Editorial: Mind the backlash: gender discrimination and sexism in contemporary societies

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gender discrimination, sexism, backlash, gender equality, masculinity

Editorial on the Research Topic
Mind the backlash: gender discrimination and sexism in contemporary societies

Decades of policy efforts have brought significant progress in women's economic and political status and advanced gender equality on the global policy agenda. The goal of gender equality, however, still remains largely out of reach, as illustrated by the recent wave of women's protests against sexual harassment and gender violence (e.g., #MeToo movement). Some European countries (e.g., Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania) have even seen their performance on gender equality backslide in recent years. In parallel with calls for increased gender equality and rights, a wave of mobilization against what has been called "gender ideology" has appeared in the public discourse. This backlash against women's empowerment carries considerable implications for anti-discrimination laws, policies protecting women against domestic violence, reproductive health, and the establishment of gender quotas, even fuelling an increase in hostility toward prominent female political figures (see for instance Brescoll et al., 2018; Krizsan and Roggeband, 2018).

Given the "backlash" against gender observed in various countries around the globe, we are at a critical crossroad not only to expand, but also to revisit our knowledge about gender discrimination, gender equality, gender rights, and sexism. Our Research Topic "*Mind the Backlash: Gender Discrimination and Sexism in Contemporary Society*" adopts a gender perspective to illustrate and understand the recent illiberal turn in politics in a variety of contexts. Our collected papers add to the renewed interest in sexism and its impact in the political sphere with the stalled progress of women's representation and the resentment surrounding Hilary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2016.

Our Research Topic presents 10 different original research papers focusing on sexism, gender(ed) attitudes, and attitudes toward gender equality, the link between these attitudes, and their potential electoral consequences. They explore the theme of sexism in politics drawing on a vast palette of methodological approaches, ranging from case studies to experimental methods. Through broad geographical coverage, our Research Topic uncovers trends that span different political and societal contexts.

The contributions can be grouped into two broad categories, with one set of papers focusing on sexism and a second set looking at attitudes toward gender equality.

Sexism

Off et al. demonstrate that young men are most likely to perceive advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities across Europe. Gothreau et al. uncover an intricate relationship between different conceptualizations of sexism and gendered attitudes, underscoring the need to consider how different forms of sexism shape broader social and political views. Beauregard et al. highlight that those holding sexist attitudes (net of other attitudes and demographic characteristics) are in favor of reducing funding for pro-women policies like social services, education, and health, while they approve of increased budgets for "male" policies such as law enforcement and defense. In another paper looking at the political consequences of sexism by Coffe et al., sexism becomes a crucial factor when studying the link between masculinity and support for the populist radical right party VOX. Sexism operates in two different ways, namely through mediating and moderating effects. Further substantiating this insight, Longdon and Banducci's conjoint experiment shows that sexist attitudes, rather than gender identity as a woman or femininity, moderate how individuals respond to politicians accused of sexual misconducts: people showing hostile sexism were less likely to punish politicians for multiple offenses and less likely to reward acknowledgment of misconduct by politicians. Last on sexism, focusing on Dilma Rousseff's presidency, Jalalzai et al. demonstrate that gender stereotypes and sexism fueled criticisms about Rousseff's political leadership, indicating a gendered double bind and a backlash against women in politics.

Attitudes toward gender equality

A second set of four papers focuses on attitudes toward gender equality in various contexts. First, Lopatina et al. observe a link between higher national pride and stricter condemnation of pro-choice attitudes in post-Soviet Armenia, but the condemnation of pro-choice attitudes does not reflect their practice of sexual and reproductive choices. Examining public perceptions of women's empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa, Thomas and Kasselstrand show attitudinal differences across countries, but also significant gender gaps across a series of explanatory factors such as diverse urban living, keeping religion a private matter, and connecting with the world via social media. Glas and Spierings investigate the impact of anti-Muslim hostilities on how Muslims connect their religiosity to support for gender equality in Western Europe and conclude that Islamic religiosities shape Muslims' support for public-sphere gender equality in far more complex ways than captured by any right-wing populist claim of one essential patriarchal Islam. A final paper by van der Pas et al. presents a large-scale vignette experiment to examine a gender bias in political candidate evaluation among voters. They find that there is a (slight) preference for women representatives among Green party voters and a clear preference for men candidates among voters of populist radical right parties.

Taken together, the contributions comprising this Research Topic substantiate that gendered attitudes and sexism play a non-negligible role in contemporary representative democracies. They suggest that sexism exerts powerful effects on the political realm, shaping attitudes about parties, policies, and politicians. Our Research Topic also highlights crucial differences between social groups in sexist attitudes and their attitudes toward gender equality, including differences between gender, age groups, religious groups, or attachment to masculinity. The broad range of countries included in our Research Topic suggests that the impact of sexism on political behavior and attitudes is observable in several different countries, namely Australia, UK, Spain, and Brazil, among others, which suggests broadly generalizable trends that potentially transcend institutional configurations.

The mere strength of the effect of sexism in all the studies presented in our Research Topic suggests the pressing need to develop comparable measures of these attitudes across contexts. In fact, the editorial team of the current Research Topic has developed European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11 Gender Attitudes Module (https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/news/essnews0094.html), that is being fielded in 2023/24 and includes questions about gender identity, salience, gender equality values, and policy preferences in over 30 European countries. Once released these high-quality data will provide an important future resource for comparative scholars seeking to address the themes and further questions raised in this Research Topic in a systematic way.

Author contributions

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The author(s) declared that they were an editorial board member of Frontiers, at the time of submission. This had no impact on the peer review process and the final decision.

Publisher's note

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Sexism and Attitudes Toward Policy Spending in Australia and the United States

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Sexist attitudes influence a wide range of political behaviors, including support for explicitly gendered policies like gender quotas. But we know much less about how sexism might broadly shape policy preferences. We argue that some policy domains are implicitly associated with being pro-women or pro-men because of gender socialization, gender segregation in the workforce, and differences in policy preferences in the general population and among political elites. As (hostile) sexists view women as inherently undeserving, making illegitimate claims on government, and getting ahead at the expense of men, we hypothesize that they will oppose policies associated with women, while supporting "male" policies such as defense and law enforcement. We test our hypothesis using the 2019 Australian Election Study and 2018 US Cooperative Congressional Study. We find similar patterns of policy preferences, wherein those holding sexist attitudes (net of other attitudes and demographic characteristics) want to cut funding for pro-women policies like social services, education, and health, while they approve of increased funding for law enforcement and defense.

Keywords: sexism, policy attitudes, government spending, gender, surveys, Australia, United States

INTRODUCTION

Gender role socialization theory argues that girls are socialized to prefer (and excel at) caring and interpersonal skills, while boys are socialized to have stronger leadership skills (Eagly and Koenig, 2006). Translating into adulthood, these gender roles shape the career choices that individuals make (Diekman et al., 2010) and the expectations about the relative traits of men and women (Eagly, 2007). These population-level gender roles then influence how men and women make political decisions, so that women in the general population support policies that help others and are in the ethos of care at higher rates than men (Diekman and Schneider, 2010; Lizotte, 2019).

Socialized perceptions of individuals' strengths and weaknesses may therefore translate into expectations about the policy strengths of women in political office (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993), including that woman are better suited to policy responsibilities such as children, education, and welfare. Extensive research finds evidence of gender stereotyping of political candidates and leaders, with consequences for electoral outcomes (Bauer, 2015, 2017; Holman et al., 2016, 2019). Additionally, women in political office become experts on making policy in these areas, both through their own interest and because of expectations placed upon them by party leaders and voters (Krook and O'Brien, 2012; Holman, 2014; Lazarus and Steigerwalt, 2018; Homola, 2021). As a result of these population level and political factors, issues like education and welfare are firmly feminized in public opinion.

In this article, we draw on gender role socialization and the feminization of policy domains to theorize that "women's policies" represent a threat to the gendered system orientation (Azevedo et al., 2017) of citizens with sexist views. While previous studies have compared men and women's gendered perceptions of politicians, leaders, and policies, this study instead looks at the relationship between (specifically hostile) sexist attitudes and those gendered perceptions. Specifically, we hypothesize that sexism negatively predicts support for government spending in policy areas "owned" by women—through gender stereotypes, gender differences in attitudes in the general population, and the actions of women in office and party leaders. Just as sexist individuals may disapprove of women leaders, so too will they disapprove of policies that they perceive as benefiting women. We test this theory using comparable measures of support for policy expenditure in two representative datasets: the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Elections Study in the United States and the 2019 Australian Election Study.

Across both cases, we find significant evidence that sexist attitudes are correlated with opposition to increased expenditure on any policy considered pro-women, even when controlling for gender, race, partisan affiliation, socio-economic status, and religion. Those who hold sexist attitudes do support funding increases in some areas though: law enforcement and national defense, or policy areas seen as pro-men and associated with masculinity. Despite a variety of political differences across the countries, the results are remarkably similar in both the United States and Australia. Our results build on work by scholars who have called for a deeper understanding of the ways that gendered attitudes shape political engagement and policy preferences, above and beyond the role of gender (Huddy and Willmann, 2018; Cassese and Barnes, 2019; Cassese, 2020).

POLICY PREFERENCES AND HOSTILE SEXISM

Preferences for government policy priorities are shaped by multidimensional factors: partisan identity (Bolsen et al., 2014), self-interest (Compton and Lipsmeyer, 2019), sociotropic concerns (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009), and ideology (Linos and West, 2003). The ideological explanation emphasizes that individuals' beliefs about the role of government and the relative importance of government and private forces comprise a general worldview, which dictates attitudes on specific policies or government expenditure. While ideology is regularly included as a core determinant of policy preferences, research rarely considers how both ideology and policies (as well as partisan identity, and the prioritization of self or community) are deeply gendered.

Gendered attitudes underpin a variety of political experiences and preferences. Here, we look explicitly at sexism, a key system-justifying belief that enables people to explain and defend inequalities between women and men (Jost and Kay, 2005). In turn, system justification theory helps individuals justify policy positions that reinforce inequalities between groups and preserve the status quo. The most explicit manifestation of sexist attitudes

in political psychology is "hostile sexism" (Glick and Fiske, 2001; Cassese and Barnes, 2019): the "antipathy toward women who are viewed as usurping men's power" (Glick and Fiske, 1996, p. 109). For hostile sexists, women seek advancement at the expense of men, and should therefore be viewed as untrustworthy, power-seeking, and manipulative (Glick and Fiske, 1996; Glick, 2019). Furthermore, women make illegitimate claims on government to advance their position beyond their innate capacities. At the extreme end, hostile sexists believe women do not deserve equal footing in society and that discrimination against them is justifiable (Glick, 2019).

These attitudes can predict a wide range of political behaviors, including perceptions of political scandals (Barnes et al., 2020), responses to electoral campaign strategies (Cassese and Holman, 2018), and vote choice in the 2016 American presidential election (Bock et al., 2017; Frasure-Yokley, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018; Cassese and Barnes, 2019; Glick, 2019), 2019 Australian election (Beauregard, 2021), and 2019 British general election (de Geus et al., 2021). Additional work has shown that sexism shapes views of explicitly gendered policies like gender quotas (Beauregard and Sheppard, 2021), but also opposition to policies that are perceived to be a threat to the status quo such as climate policy (Benegal and Holman, 2021). We extend this literature by arguing that hostile sexist attitudes underpin respondents' views of which policy areas deserve funding, and which do not. Since hostile sexists view women as undeserving, as making illegitimate claims on government, and making gains at the expanse of men, we hypothesize that they will reject policies that are typically considered feminine and could be perceived as disturbing the gendered status quo and support policies considered masculine and that maintain the status quo.

Hostile sexism is just one dimension of sexist views present in the public; many people also hold benevolent sexist views, which are rooted in the separate social roles that men and women occupy in society (Glick and Fiske, 1996; Glick, 2019). Benevolent sexists view women as needing protecting and men as the natural providers of that protection. Research on the effects of benevolent sexism on political attitudes and behaviors are much more mixed: benevolent sexists were not more likely to support Trump in 2016 or Boris Johnson in 2019 (de Geus et al., 2021). In this paper, we focus on hostile sexism for both theoretical and methodological reasons (which we discuss throughout the paper). The next section reviews how some public policies are gendered and describes the mechanisms through which hostile sexist attitudes affect policy attitudes.

GENDERED PERCEPTIONS OF POLICIES AND HOSTILE SEXISM

Gender role socialization theorizes that children are differentially socialized through internal and external rewards and punishments: girls are encouraged to develop interpersonal skills, to be more caring, and to engage in interpersonal smoothing, while boys are more commonly socialized to have leadership skills, to be more assertive and aggressive, and to be more inwardly concerned (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002;

Schneider and Bos, 2019). These gender roles translate into expectations, or gender stereotypes, which tend to associate adult women with being more caring and compassionate while men are more aggressive and decisive. Accordingly, these have been linked with perceptions of women being better at caring work (such as being teachers or nurses) and men at work requiring physical abilities or leadership (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002).

These gender stereotypes have carried on to the political arena where policies are often seen as either feminine or masculine. Generally, policy areas that concerns the public sphere are deemed to be masculine (construction and public work, correctional service/police, defense, military and national/public security, enterprise, and transport) and policy areas associated with the private sphere are considered feminine (children and family, education, and health and social welfare) (Herrnson et al., 2003; Krook and O'Brien, 2012). This gendered division of policy areas can be observed both at the elite and individual level.

Gendered Behaviors Among Women Elites

At the elite level, gender differences in expertise and authority align with gender roles in society. By way of example, women promoted to political executives have disproportionately been appointed to portfolio areas reflecting traditional stereotypes (Davis, 1997; Reynolds, 1999; Siaroff, 2000; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Krook and O'Brien, 2012; Barnes and O'Brien, 2018). Women cabinet ministers or secretaries are more commonly assigned to health, social welfare, education, family, and culture responsibilities while men are more often responsible for economic affairs, defense, employment, and the budget. Furthermore, when women are assigned to typically male executive roles such as finance or defense, it is often (ostensibly, at least) to help a government reverse public perceptions of corruption or malfeasance—what has been called a "housekeeping" role (Armstrong et al., 2021).

The same phenomenon exists at sub-executive levels. Research on parliamentary committee finds gender differences in membership that follow gender stereotypes of labor division (Heath et al., 2005; Barnes, 2014; Bolzendahl, 2014; Pansardi and Vercesi, 2017; Goodwin et al., 2021). For instance, Coffé et al. (2019) find that women are overrepresented on parliamentary committees examining femininized issues such as health and family while men are overrepresented on committees overseeing foreign affairs and defense. These gender differences may reflect MPs' individual preferences, or women MPs might strategically specialize in policy areas less favored by men as a way of gaining access to parliamentary committees. However, similar differences also occur in electoral campaigns where women are more likely to talk about social policy issues than men (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2017), and in the legislature once elected (Bäck and Debus, 2019).

These patterns can be accelerated and encouraged by the behaviors of parties themselves, which engage in strategic action to attract voters by focusing on policies that give them a comparative advantage (Ondercin, 2017; Holman and Kalmoe, 2021). Indeed, parties on the left elevate women's issues on their party platforms, elite communication, committee appointments,

and votes (Holman and Kalmoe, 2021; Coffé et al., 2019; Espìrito-Santo et al., 2020). Over time, parties on the right have engaged in strategic action to try to attract women voters by supporting issues like gender quotas and putting women on party tickets, but these have not generally been accompanied by concrete policy action on women's issues (Weeks et al., 2022). The actions of parties, particularly on the left, to focus on issues associated with women's concerns, then attract women as voters, reinforcing these patterns (Ondercin, 2017, 2018; Homola, 2019).

Overall, this literature finds that gendered divisions of labor in political work are both persistent across time (although some evidence suggests that it is slowly declining in advanced democracies) and in executive, legislative, and campaign contexts. The presence of women in politics can prompt citizens to think about appropriate roles for women in their society, in turn cuing gendered responses to survey questions on political attitudes (Atkeson, 2003; Morgan and Buice, 2013). Further, female politicians' perceptions of gendered expertise may discourage them from speaking on masculine-coded policy areas and risk any associated criticism for failing to conform to gendered expectations or for not "staying in their lane" (Atkinson et al., 2022).

Gendered Perceptions of Policy Competencies

When politicians behave in ways that both create and perpetuate gendered norms around policy domains, citizens are more likely to perceive those domains as gendered, and then to reward or punish those politicians for how they perform in policy areas that align with their gender. American voters perceive women candidates as more qualified to deal with traditionally-defined female issues relating to the private sphere, and men as more competent to deal with public sphere related policies (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Fridkin and Kenney, 2009; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009).

However, research outside the United States has found less delineation between feminine and masculine policy areas (Devroe and Wauters, 2018; Lefkofridi et al., 2019). In Australia, Carson et al. (2019) even find that women are perceived to be more competent than men at both military and health care issues, but this has so far proven an outlier in the field. Bauer (2020) finds that female candidates emphasizing typical female issues such as education, health care, and welfare have better leadership evaluations generally: female candidates engaging with typically feminine identified issues send the signal that they are representing women's interests in a traditionally male arena. Alternatively, voters punish female candidates when they are perceived as not advancing women's issues or when they lack feminine traits (Cassese and Holman, 2018). When women politicians fail in feminized policy domains—their "home turf"—they lose votes (Roberts and Utych, 2022).

Further, voters who hold traditional views on gender (e.g., "gender essentialists") are more likely to punish political candidates who engage in issues outside of their gendered domains (Swigger and Meyer, 2019). Gender essentialism is the tendency to believe traditional gender differences are natural,

intrinsic, and immutable factors. While gender essentialism is different than hostile sexism, Swigger and Meyer (2019)'s findings indicate that respondent gender is not sufficient in understanding hostility toward politicians who cross into counter-gender policy areas; attitudes toward men and women and their roles in society are more useful predictors of subsequent evaluations of those politicians.

Gender Gaps in Policy Preferences

Beyond the perceived competencies of men and women politicians, men and women voters regularly report differences in policy salience and preferred policy outcomes (regardless of the gender of the politician delivering a policy). Women are commonly more likely to support government expenditure in feminized issue domains such as welfare, health, and childcare (Schlesinger and Heldman, 2001; Gidengil et al., 2003; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Huddy et al., 2008; Barnes and Cassese, 2017). On the other hand, men are more supportive of the military use of force (Lizotte, 2017, 2019). Feminist actors have successfully leveraged gender gaps in public opinion and issue salience to frame certain issues as "women's issues" and focus public attention accordingly (Campbell, 2016; Yildirim, 2021). This approach has seen policy success in domains such as welfare spending and childcare reforms, with women voters persuaded to support policies across partisan boundaries.

We might therefore expect a "backlash effect" among voters with hostile sexist attitudes, as greater public framing and perception of certain issues as benefiting women makes those issues particularly salient. Policy advocated by feminist actors (Celis and Childs, 2020) should be perceived as disrupting the male-dominated status quo and as such should be opposed by hostile sexists. Furthermore, the greater support for some policy issues by women than men should indicate to hostile sexists that these policies are unworthy of government action and government engaging on this policy can only occur at the expense of the interests and priorities of men.

One caveat in the discussion of policy preferences is that few existing measures constrain preferences to be revenue-neutral (Barnes et al., 2021). Survey questions rarely force respondents to choose to increase funding in some policy areas while reducing it in others, so there is nothing to stop an individual from reporting a preference for increased expenditure across all domains. Other measures take a more expressive approach, asking respondents to name (or choose from within a list) the most important issues facing them personally or the country in general. We might conceptualize these different approaches as occupying a spectrum "embracing complexity of budget decision-making" to "measuring top-of-mind responses to different types of policy." We currently have little sense of how gendered policy preferences might be conditional on the complexity of the measure, although Barnes et al. (2021) find that women and men have very similar views on which policies deserve more and less funding (in a revenue-neutral context) compared with earlier findings that (in unconstrained measures) women are more likely to prefer more government spending across both "male" and "female" domains (e.g., Gidengil et al., 2003).

Overall, the extant literature provides ample evidence that many public policies are gendered—that is, commonly associated with one gender or the other, by both political elites and ordinary citizens. This gendered differentiation of government actions tends to reflect stereotypes about the division of the public and private sphere. However, it is important to note that the gender differences identified above are tendencies. Men (and women, respectively) can and do support typically feminine (masculine) policies and/or engage across "gender lines." Gendered policy division patterns are the broader picture and are reflected in the division of labor among elected representatives, the stereotypes citizens use to assess politicians and their expertise, and the policy preferences of women and men. In turn, these patterns should signal to hostile sexists that feminine policy areas should be opposed while masculine policy priorities should be supported.

Individuals with high levels of hostile sexism will be more likely to support increasing funding for men's issue policies and decrease funding for women's issue policies.

DATA AND METHODS

To evaluate our hypothesis on the relationship between sexist attitudes and policy preferences, we rely on the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and the 2019 Australian Election Study (AES). The CCES is uses online sampling from YouGov panels, advertisements, and other survey draws to collect political attitudes from a nationally representative sample of 60,000 respondents in its 2018 survey. The AES is sampled *via* the Geo-Coded National Address Frame, a national register of Australian addresses, and surveys completed either online (push-to-web) or *via* hardcopy questionnaire. The 2019 survey received 2179 responses with an effective response rate of 42.1%. Both datasets contain similar measures of sexist attitudes and policy support. The inclusion of data from both the United States and Australia allows to compare the relationship between sexist attitudes and policy preferences in a context where sexism is cued (United States) to a context where sexism plays a much less visible role (Australia). Cassese and Barnes (2019) argue that the election of Donald Trump in 2016 introduced an explicit gendered dynamic into the election and that this campaign context can explain why sexist attitudes matter to understand vote choice in 2016, but not in 2012. On the other hand, the 2019 (and the previous 2016). Australian election did not feature any comparable degree of gendered dynamics. Leaders of both major political parties were men, and gender issues were not especially salient throughout the campaign. However, sexism in Australian politics does remain salient among some voters following the leadership of Julia Gillard from 2010 to 2013 (Beauregard, 2021). Without direct measures of perceived policy competencies, we focus exclusively on respondents' policy preferences in this study.

Spending Preferences

We use very similarly worded questions from the 2018 CCES and the 2019 AES to measure spending preferences among Americans and Australians. Using the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Elections Study (CCES), we look at responses to the question, "State legislatures must make choices when making spending

decisions on important state programs. How would you like your legislature to spend money on each of the five areas below? Greatly increase; Slightly increase, Maintain; Slightly decrease; Greatly decrease." As discussed, this measure does not constrain the respondent to revenue-neutrality but does provide a simple and easily understandable measure of expressive policy preferences. The five policy areas include: Education, Welfare, Healthcare, Transportation/Infrastructure, and Law Enforcement. The order of policies was randomized for each respondent. Among the areas, we categorize welfare, education, and healthcare as feminine issues areas, while law enforcement is a traditional masculine area (Lizotte, 2019); we are agnostic as to the gendered nature of infrastructure and transportation. **Table 1** provides the spending priorities of Americans about these areas: across all respondents, increased education spending attracts the most support, while welfare spending is the least popular.

To evaluate policy preferences, we use 10 questions from the AES asking respondents: "Should there be more or less public expenditure in the following area? (1) Heath; (2) Education; (3) Unemployment benefits; (4) Defense; (5) Old-age pensions; (6) Business and industry; (7) Police and law enforcement; (8) The National Disability Insurance Scheme; (9) Public transport and infrastructure; and (10) Child care." The order of policy (1) through (10) was randomized for each respondent. The response frame included: (1) Much more than now; (2) Somewhat more than now; (3) The same as now; (4) Somewhat less than now; and (5) Much less than now. Among the 10 policy areas, defense, police and law enforcement, and business and industry can be classified as masculine areas (Krook and O'Brien, 2012). Health, education, unemployment benefits, old-age pensions, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and childcare are considered feminine policy areas. Again, we are agnostic about public transport and infrastructure.

Table 2 displays the spending preferences of Australians in the 2019 election. Most respondents favor increasing spending for health, education, old-age pensions, public transport and infrastructure, and police and law enforcement. A plurality of respondents favors spending to remain the same for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, childcare, and unemployment benefits while a majority of respondents want spending to remain at the same level for business and industry.

Sexism

Both surveys ask questions aimed at tapping into hostile sexist views; we focus on measuring hostile sexism because we have clear theoretical expectations for how hostile sexism should relate to views on funding by policy arena and we have comparable measures across surveys in the two countries. We use two questions from the CCES to evaluate sexist attitudes: "Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men" (reverse coded) and "When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against." **Table 3** shows that responses to both questions are distributed evenly across all five categories; slightly more respondents display hostile sexist responses than not. We combine the two questions into a single index of the averaged response to the questions for subsequent regression analyses. These

two questions are highly correlated (0.43) and hang together well (alpha 0.7059) in a single measure. Main results from the paper are replicated with individual sexism measures (see **Appendix B**).

Sexist attitudes among Australians are measured with an abbreviated version of the hostile sexism scale developed by (Glick and Fiske, 1996). The AES includes three questions from this scale: "Please say whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of these statements (1) Many women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist; (2) Women fail to appreciate what men do for them; and (3) Women seek to gain power by getting control over men." All three questions are correlated with each other and were combined in a single index of the averaged response to the questions (alpha 0.8303). Main results from the paper are replicated with individual sexism measures (see **Appendix B**). **Table 4** presents the distribution of answers for all three sexism questions and demonstrates that more than 40% of Australian respondents agree or strongly agree that women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist. This is followed by over 18% of Australians who agree with the statement that women seek to gain power by getting control over men and 17% of respondents who agree that women fail to appreciate what men do for them. Across the three questions, Australian respondents demonstrate less hostile sexism than 2018 American respondents.

Finally, a series of control variables are used in the analyses with efforts to standardize across the two datasets as much as possible. The control variables include gender (Women = 1), age, annual household income (categorical), education (categorical), partisanship (Democratic = 1 in US; Labor = 1 in Australia; others = 0), and religion (Catholic, Evangelical, not religious, others). In the United States, we control for race.

RESULTS

To start, we examine the bivariate relationships between sexism and spending preferences through correlations and linear fit lines, presenting the US data in the left-hand pane and the Australian data in the right-hand pane. Given that we have expectations for sexism to be associated with preferences for decreased spending in some areas and increased spending in others, we separate out women's issue areas (left) and men's issue areas (right). We have no strong a priori expectations for the gendered nature of infrastructure and transportation; some research would suggest that women in office prioritize the funding of issues like education and social services at the expense of infrastructure (e.g., Barnes et al., 2021) and men hold the overwhelming majority of jobs in this area (Barnes and Holman, 2021). This might produce the expectations that this area will be associated with men's issues and sexism will be positively correlated with the area. However, given that transportation is a public good and the AES asks about "public" transportation, we might expect that this policy area would be seen as expanding the size of government and as a form of wealth transfer, thus grouping it with women's issues. We thus are agnostic about the direction of the effect for attitudes about spending on

TABLE 1 | Spending priorities in US, CCES 2018.

	Greatly increase	Slightly increase	Maintain	Slightly decrease	Greatly decrease
Education	42	28	22	4	3
Healthcare	38	27	24	5	4
Infrastructure/transportation	32	37	29	3	1
Law enforcement	22	33	35	5	3
Welfare	15	16	36	19	12

Cell entries are percentages of all respondents. Shaded cells indicate modal responses.

TABLE 2 | Spending preferences in Australia, AES 2019.

	Much more	Somewhat more	Same	Somewhat less	Much less
Health	33	45	21	1	1
Education	28	42	26	2	1
Old-age pensions	24	44	27	3	2
Public transport and infrastructure	22	39	34	3	2
Police and law enforcement	17	37	39	5	2
The National Disability Insurance Scheme	17	30	44	6	3
Childcare	14	28	42	11	5
Unemployment benefits	10	22	42	19	8
Defense	8	22	49	13	8
Business and industry	7	20	52	15	5

Cell entries are percentages of all respondents. Shaded cells indicate modal responses.

TABLE 3 | Sexist attitudes in US, CCES 2018.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Feminist reasonable—reverse	21	21	22	17	19
Women complain	18	18	28	25	11

Cell entries are percentages of all respondents.

TABLE 4 | Sexist attitudes in Australia, AES 2019.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Women interpret innocent remarks as being sexist	10	17	30	32	11
Women fail to appreciate what men do	22	25	35	13	4
Women seek to gain power over men	22	27	33	15	4

Cell entries are percentages.

infrastructure and transportation, but generally group it with men's issues in the results that we present.

Looking first at the bivariate relationship between spending and sexism for women's issues in the United States (see **Figure 1**), we see a strong, consistent, negative relationship, with preferences for spending on welfare, education, and health decreasing as an individual's sexist preferences increase in the United States. With men's issues, however, we see a different pattern. Spending preferences on police fit with our expectations, but infrastructure does not.

We see very similar patterns when we look at the bivariate relationships among Australians, as displayed in **Figure 2**. Overall, we see consistent patterns: sexism is associated with decreased preferences for spending on women's issues and increased spending on men's issues. Again, however, we find exceptions: pensions do not follow this pattern,

FIGURE 1 | Spending preferences and Sexism (United States, CCES 2018). Sexism ranges from 1 (low levels of sexism) to 5 (high levels of sexism).

FIGURE 2 | Spending preferences and Sexism (Australia, AES 2019). Sexism ranges from 1 (low levels of sexism) to 5 (high levels of sexism).
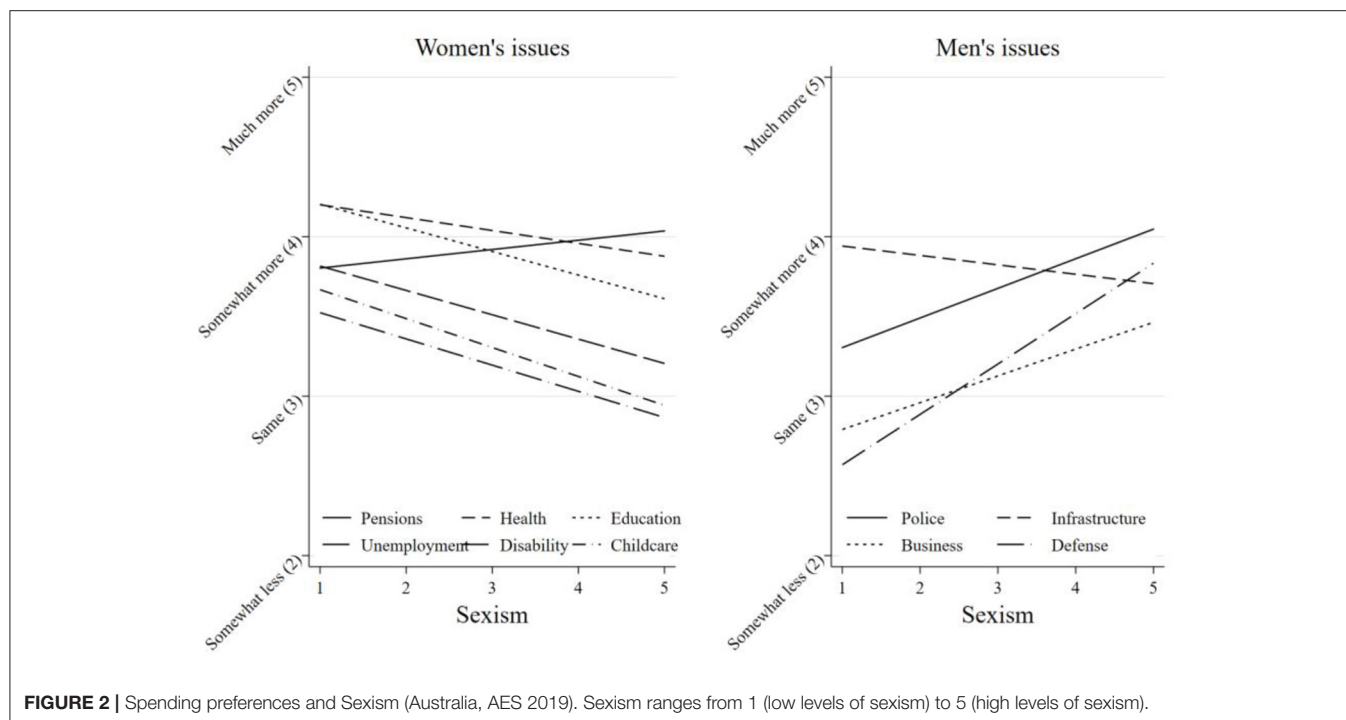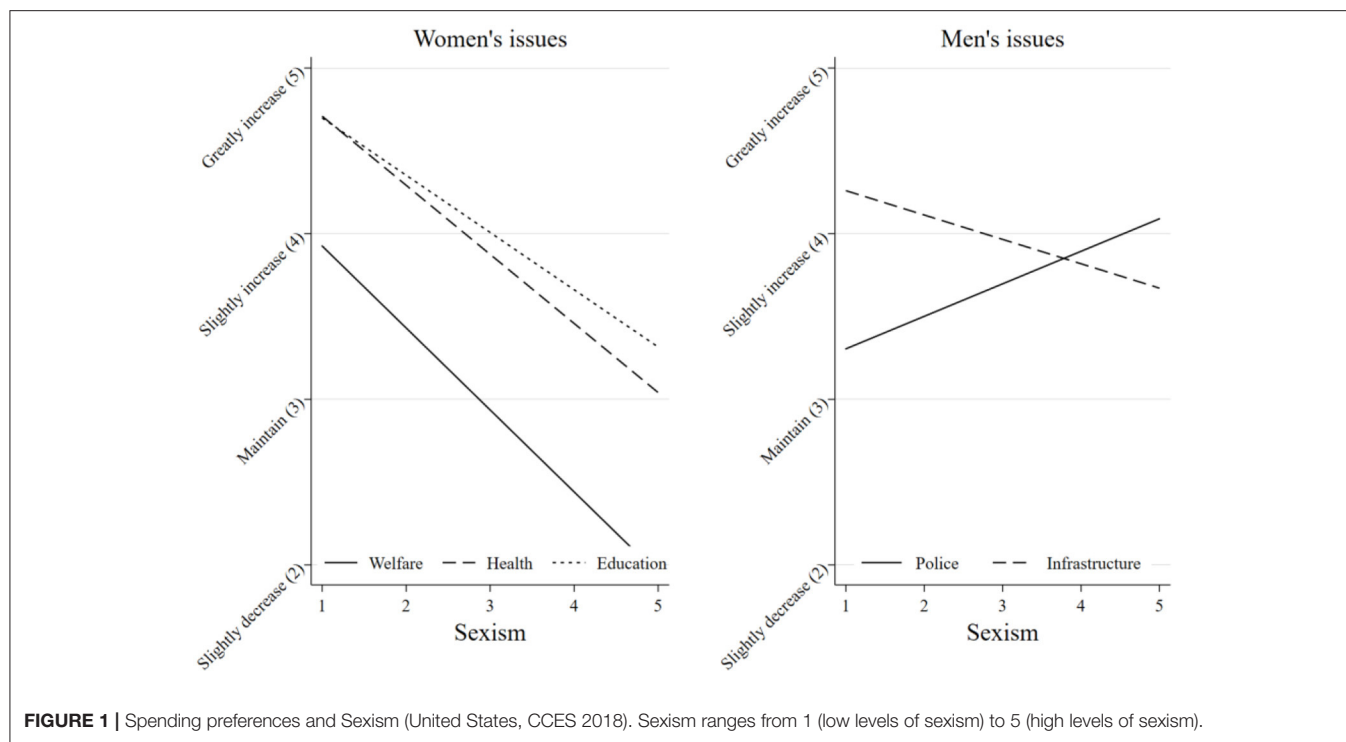
with sexism positively correlated with the issue, even as it falls somewhat under the "women's issue" umbrella. And, again, like we found in the United States, we see that infrastructure is not positively correlated with sexism, but instead negatively correlated.

Multivariate Models

We next present multivariate models chronologically and start with the United States with the 2018 CCES results (**Table 5**), estimating each model of support for decreased or increased spending on welfare, health care, education, law

TABLE 5 | Hostile sexism and preferences for state spending, CCES 2018.

	Welfare	Health	Education	Police	Infrastructure
Sexism	−0.54***	−0.49***	−0.41***	0.26***	−0.19***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Female	−0.06***	0.24***	0.26***	0.46***	−0.36***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	−0.20***	0.02*	−0.14***	0.38***	0.29***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Education	−0.01	−0.13***	−0.01	−0.18***	0.11***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Income	−0.37***	−0.26***	−0.06***	0.00	0.04***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Democrat	1.27***	1.26***	0.94***	−0.27***	0.50***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Born Again	0.23***	0.07*	−0.04	0.41***	−0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Catholic	−0.25***	−0.13***	−0.14***	0.30***	−0.09***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Evangelical	−0.41***	−0.22***	0.03	−0.06	−0.01
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Not Religious	−0.11***	0.03	0.05*	−0.10***	−0.02
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Other Relig	0.14***	0.00	0.01	0.05^	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
White	−0.15***	−0.14***	−0.22***	−0.08***	−0.08***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Cut 1	−3.43***	−4.56***	−4.75***	−2.79***	−5.22***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Cut 2	−2.27***	−3.60***	−3.86***	−1.66***	−4.04***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Cut 3	−0.22***	−1.69***	−1.85***	0.73***	−1.50***
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Cut 4	1.11***	−0.28***	−0.47***	2.34***	0.11**
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Observations	46,534	46,526	46,497	46,469	46,486
Pseudo R^2	0.12	0.11	0.08	0.05	0.03

*Ordinal logistical regression. Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable: five-point scale from greatly decrease (1) to greatly increase (5). ^p < 0.10, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.*

enforcement, and transportation/infrastructure as an ordinal logistic regression. As expected, we find that hostile sexist attitudes are associated with support for reducing state spending on welfare, health care, and education and increasing spending on law enforcement. Interestingly, we see a continuation of the pattern on infrastructure: we find significant negative effects for transportation / infrastructure, a policy domain where we were agnostic about the effects of sexism. As we previously note, it may be that sexists associated a larger state and more spending *generally* with women's issues; we also see that the explained variance on the infrastructure model is much lower than the other models, suggesting different explanatory variables for spending on infrastructure.

To provide an example of the substantive effects of sexism on policy attitudes, we next use post-estimation predicted probabilities to examine the average level of support for funding change across the spectrum of sexist attitudes in **Figure 3**. We estimate how the distribution of selecting "slightly decrease" and "slightly increase" as response options varies by individual sexist attitudes and plot those effects, with vertical bars indicating confidence intervals. We find substantively large, counter directional trends for the effect on sexism on attitudes about welfare: among those with low levels of sexism, there is a 29% probability of selecting the option "slightly increase" but only an 8% probability of selecting "slightly decrease." In comparison, among those with high levels of sexism, we see almost exactly the reverse pattern: a 7% probability of selecting the slightly increase option and a 27% probability of selecting the slightly decrease. In comparison, sexism shapes views toward policing but with very different overall patterns: the probability of selecting "slightly

FIGURE 3 | Sexism and preferences for welfare and law enforcement spending (US, CCES 2018). *Post-hoc* predicted values selection of "slightly decrease" and "slightly increase" generated from **Table 5** with full controls. Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals.
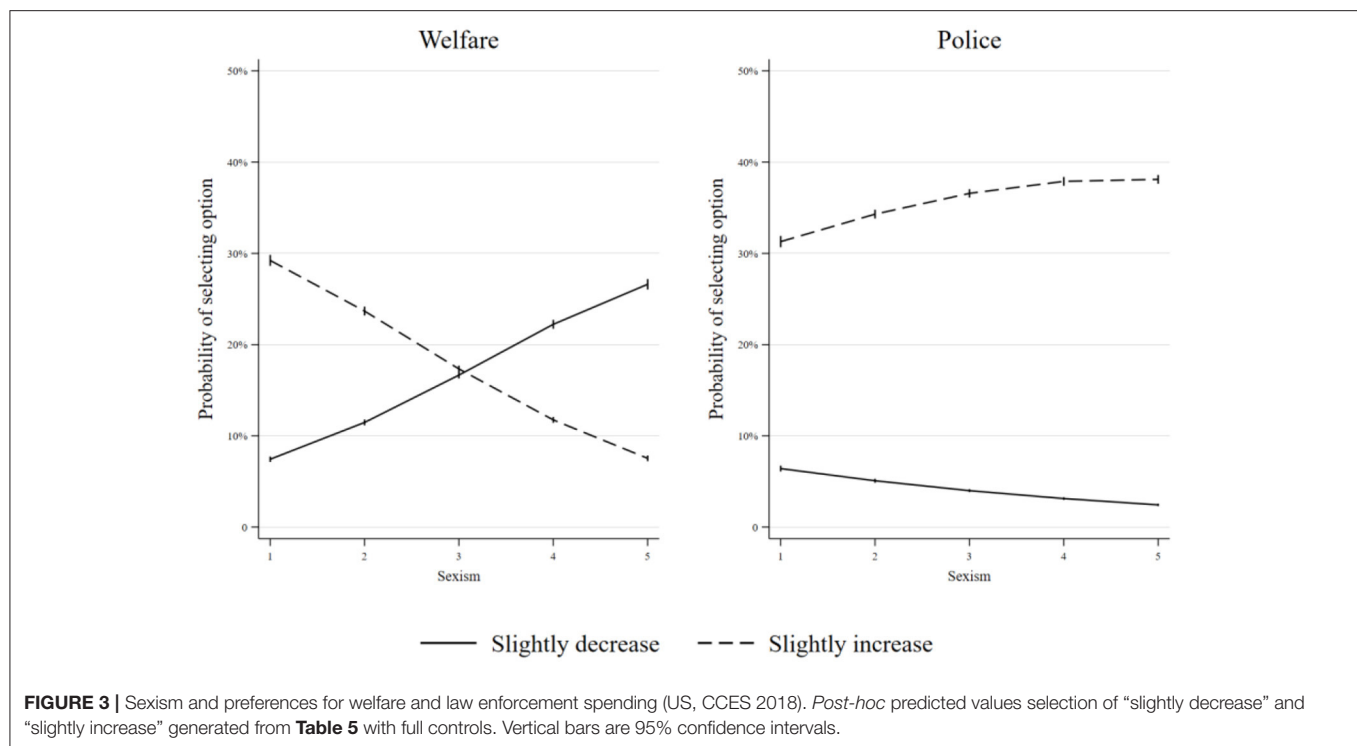
increase" improves from 31 to 37% as individuals increase in sexism, and slightly decrease declines from 6 to 2%. In short, sexism is associated with much larger swings in preferences for the women's issue compared to the men's issue.

We next examine these multivariate relationships in Australia using ordinal logistical regression models. As expected, Australian respondents with high levels of hostile sexism are significantly less likely to favor increasing spending for women-friendly policy areas such as education, unemployment benefits, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and childcare (**Table 6**) as well as policy areas associated with men (such as defense and police) and those areas where we are agnostic toward the effects (such as infrastructure); these results are presented in **Table 7**. We do identify surprising findings, starting with the non-significant relationship between sexist attitudes and preferences for health spending, aged pensions, and business and industry. Most research on gendered policy areas is from the United States; one possibility for these findings is that these policy areas are not associated with a particular gender in Australia. For example, health may be perceived as a comparatively neutral policy due to the presence of universal government-provided healthcare.

Among the masculine policy areas included in **Table 6**, hostile sexist attitudes are significantly associated with preferences for increased spending on defense and police and law enforcement, supporting our hypothesis. Sexist respondents' preferences for decreased spending for public transport and infrastructure are interesting. We were agnostic to the gendering of these areas with a weak expectation that sexist orientations should lead to preference for increased spending. We do not find this: sexism

is associated with reduced preferences for spending. A possible explanation for the results in **Table 6** might be that the questions in the AES include the words "public transport." Public transport might be associated in the mind of respondents with welfare types of programs involving government spending that tend to benefit women. In this sense, taking the bus or train to go to work as opposed to using your car might be perceived as feminine (Benegal and Holman, 2021). Consequently, respondents holding sexist attitudes favor less spending on such government services.

As another simple illustration of the patterns that we see in the data, we again use post-estimation predicted probabilities to examine the average level of support for funding change across the spectrum of sexist attitudes (**Figure 4**). We focus on the probability that an individual selected either of the mild preference options: "Slightly less" and "Slightly more." We see a crossing and substantively large substantive effects for the spending preferences on the woman's issue (unemployment benefits) in a pattern that looks remarkably similar to the US data. Here, we also observe an interesting pattern in the policing question, where the effect of sexism is substantively larger in shaping the probability of selecting the "somewhat more" option. Here, the probability of selecting "somewhat less" declines from 7 to 2%, but "somewhat more" increases from 31 to 44% across the sexism measure.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented above support our hypotheses regarding the relationship between sexist attitudes and policy spending

TABLE 6 | Hostile sexism and preferences for spending on women's issues, AES 2019.

	Health	Education	Unemployment benefits	Old-age pensions	The national disability insurance scheme	Child care
Sexism	−0.07	−0.25***	−0.28***	0.02	−0.24***	−0.19***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Female	0.34***	0.04	−0.03	0.43***	0.30**	0.25**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Age	−0.08	−0.19***	0.28***	0.29***	−0.04	−0.24***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Education	−0.23***	−0.05	0.03	−0.23***	−0.10*	−0.12*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Income	−0.12*	−0.06	−0.54***	−0.27***	−0.15**	−0.06
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Labor	0.67***	0.57***	0.63***	0.17^	0.52***	0.34***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Catholic	0.02	−0.21	−0.03	0.04	0.06	0.07
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Evangelical	−0.55*	−0.27	−0.57*	−0.04	−0.46^	−0.04
	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Not Religious	0.04	0.04	0.36**	0.10	0.07	0.14
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)
Other Religion	0.02	0.19	0.07	−0.17	0.39*	0.15
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Cut 1	−5.91***	−5.63***	−3.53***	−4.33***	−3.84***	−3.03***
	(0.52)	(0.36)	(0.21)	(0.28)	(0.23)	(0.21)
Cut 2	−4.31***	−4.02***	−1.82***	−3.05***	−2.52***	−1.79***
	(0.29)	(0.23)	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.19)
Cut 3	−0.97***	−1.36***	0.17	−0.61**	−0.09	0.30
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Cut 4	1.03***	0.59**	1.76***	1.40***	1.45***	1.93***
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)
Observations	1,861	1,867	1,861	1,862	1,864	1,861
Pseudo R^2	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.02	0.02

Ordinal logistical regression. Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is preference that public expenditure in area much less than now (1), somewhat less than now (2), the same as now (3), somewhat more than now (4), and much more than now (5). ^p < 0.10, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

preferences. Specifically, we hypothesized that individuals displaying hostile sexist attitudes should be less supportive of public policy considered feminine, and more supportive of masculinized public policies compare individuals that disagree with sexist attitudes. We find significant evidence that sexist attitudes are correlated with rejection of spending on welfare policies including health education, childcare and disability insurance, even when controlling for gender, race, partisan affiliation, socio-economic status, and religion. On the other hand, sexist attitudes are significantly associated with preferences for greater spending on police, law enforcement, and defense. We explain these findings by arguing that some public policies are "owned" by women, through gender stereotypes, gender differences in attitudes in the general population, and the actions of women in office and party leaders. As hostile sexism is associated with beliefs that women are undeserving and are making illegitimate claims on government, and that any gain achieved by women will be at the expanse of men, sexist

individuals believe that feminine policy areas are similarly undeserving, illegitimate, and take away from more worthy masculine policy areas. We find support for this argument with public opinion data from the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Elections Study in the United States and the 2019 Australian Election Study.

The findings present here help resolve one of the central challenges of understanding the role of sexism in modern politics. Our approach accounts for the presence of hostile sexism across gender divides (Beauregard and Sheppard, 2021) and gets closer to uncovering a mechanism that explains why gendered assessments of "suitable" political work for men and women politicians persist, even as we become more used to seeing women in power (Atkinson, 2020; Hargrave and Blumenau, 2021). Indeed, the increased presence of women politicians responsible and discussing welfare, health, family, and childcare policies might lead hostile sexist individuals to view these policy areas as unworthy of government action, as taking resources

TABLE 7 | Hostile sexism and preferences for spending on men's issues, AES 2019.

	Police and law enforcement	Defense	Business and industry	Public transport/infrastructure
Sexism	0.27***	0.46***	0.01	−0.22***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Female	0.23*	0.33***	−0.16^	−0.57***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Age	0.29***	0.27***	0.09^	0.14**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Education	−0.31***	−0.10*	−0.08	0.01
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Income	−0.08	−0.14**	−0.10*	−0.01
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Labor	−0.02	−0.03	−0.16	0.19^
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Catholic	−0.02	0.01	0.14	0.15
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Evangelical	0.21	0.29	−0.77**	−0.24
	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.27)
Not Religious	−0.39**	−0.60***	−0.21^	0.30*
	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)
Other Religion	−0.50**	−0.93***	−0.20	0.15
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)
Cut 1	−3.74***	−1.72***	−3.05***	−5.30***
	(0.25)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.29)
Cut 2	−2.23***	−0.51**	−1.53***	−3.79***
	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.22)
Cut 3	0.36^	1.98***	0.89***	−1.22***
	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Cut 4	2.28***	3.52***	2.39***	0.55**
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.19)
Observations	1,865	1,862	1,857	1,863
Pseudo R^2	0.05	0.06	0.01	0.02

*Ordinal logistical regression. Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is preference that public expenditure in area much less than now (1), somewhat less than now (2), the same as now (3), somewhat more than now (4), and much more than now (5). ^$p < 0.10$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.*

away from more deserving (male) policy area, and as being use by women to challenge the status quo, which in turn will lead hostile sexists to oppose resources for femininized policy areas. That women in government are more effective policy leaders (Holman et al., 2021; Homola, 2021) might accelerate backlash effects from sexists.

One of the consistent and surprising findings in our research is that infrastructure does not fit with our expectations as a "man's issue" in either the United States or Australia. Here, more work in needed to understand attitudes about infrastructure spending in both countries and how it fits or does not fit with a gendered categorization scheme. Research on spending outcomes at the state and local level find that women's representation (particularly women from specific backgrounds) is often associated with increased spending on women's issues (Holman, 2014; Barnes et al., 2021), and *decreased* spending on infrastructure. Future research might consider the ways that attitudes about infrastructure map onto

more general preferences about the size of government and gendered associations.

Despite a variety of political differences across the countries, the results are remarkably similar in both the United States and Australia. As such, influence of sexism on political behavior does not necessarily need to be cued by election campaign dynamics or strategies—at least for policy preferences. This may set policy preferences apart from voting behavior for candidates (see Cassese and Holman, 2018). Arguably, gender and sexism were more of a direct concern in the United States than Australia in the last election in both countries. However, Australia did experience public debates concerning gender and sexism during and after the 2010–2013 prime ministership of Julia Gillard, and this may have ongoing effects on political attitudes. Our findings also present enlightening differences between the two countries, particularly on attitudes toward health spending. While American sexists prefer less spending on health, there is no significant relationship between sexist orientations and

FIGURE 4 | Sexism and spending preferences on unemployment benefits and police, AES 2019. *Post-hoc* predicted selection of "slightly decrease" and "slightly increase" values generated from **Tables 6**, **7** with full controls. Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals.
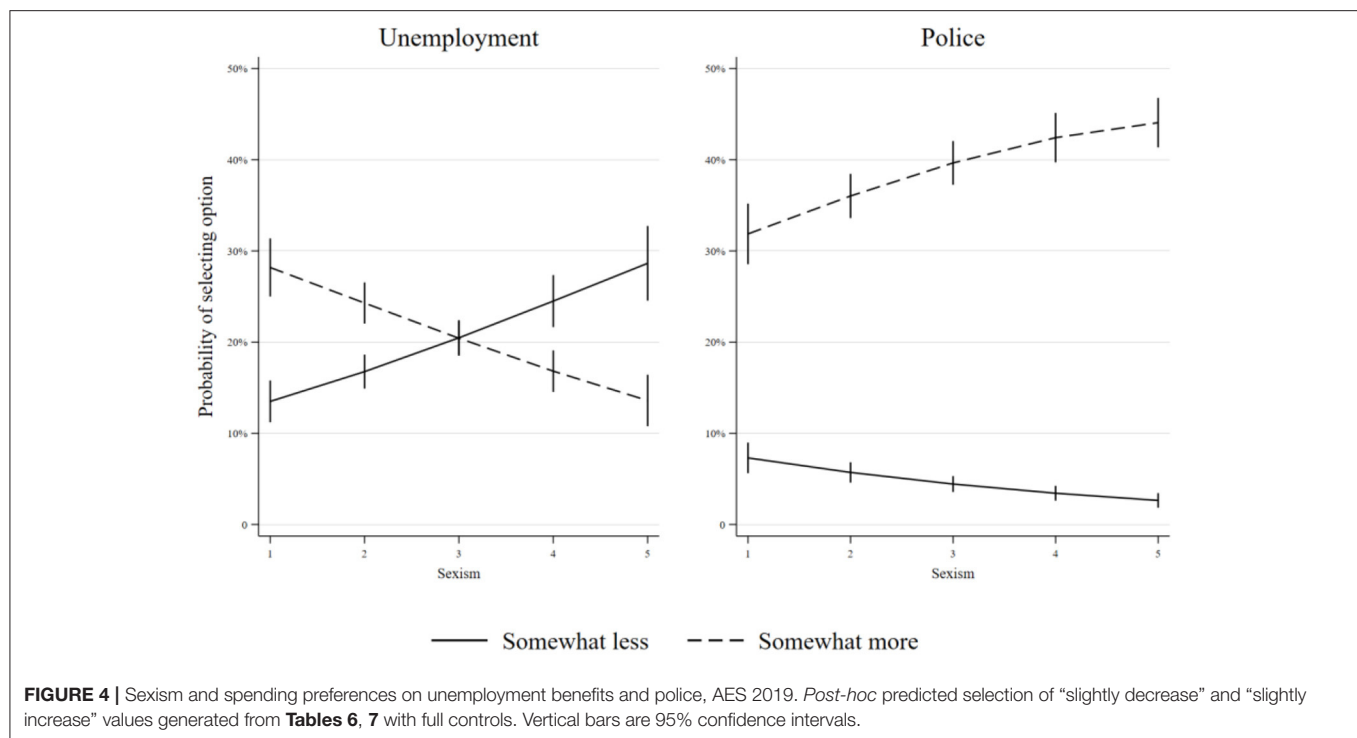
spending preferences in Australia. This result might indicate that some policy areas can be delivered and framed in such ways as not to follow the typically feminine/private and masculine/public dichotomy. Finally, in both the United States and Australia, racism also shapes public opinion (Hutchings et al., 2021) but operates on an overlapping and varying structure from sexism (Banda and Cassese, 2021). Future research might evaluate how some policy arenas are both gendered and racialized (Benegal and Holman, 2021), thus shaping support for policies.

While the United States and Australia provide excellent comparative cases because of the similarities of the two countries, the nature of politics, service provision, and sexism in the countries also gives rise to questions about the applicability of these findings to other countries. Future research might examine the degree to which these relationships are present in countries with stronger welfare systems, pluralistic multi-party governing structures, or lower levels of sexism. Examining these relationships in New Zealand, Sweden, or Germany, for example, might tell us something about how politics shape the relationship between sexism and policy preferences. While scholars have documented the relationship between sexism and vote choice in the United States (Cassese and Barnes, 2019; Cassese and Holman, 2019), Australia (Beauregard, 2021), and the United Kingdom (de Geus et al., 2021), we

know much less about gender stereotypes, sexism, and policy preferences in other settings, including in the Global South. Future research might also consider the ways that policy preferences and sexism shape preferences for right-leaning parties, particularly in multi-party systems or those with more extremist parties.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data for both the CCES and the AES are open-access and can be freely downloaded. Further inquiries can be directed at the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.892111/full#supplementary-material

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Hostile, Benevolent, Implicit: How Different Shades of Sexism Impact Gendered Policy Attitudes

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Advances in gender equality and progressive policies are often stymied by cultural sexist systems and individual-level sexist attitudes. These attitudes are pervasive but vary in type—from benevolent to hostile and implicit to explicit. Understanding the types of sexism and their foundations are important for identifying connections to specific social and political attitudes and behaviors. The current study examines the impact of various manifestations of sexism on attitudes regarding policies and public opinion issues that involve gender equality or have gendered implications. More specifically, we look at attitudes on reproductive rights, support for the #MeToo Movement, equal pay, and paid leave policies. In Study 1 we use data from a high-quality web panel ($n = 1,400$) to look at the relationship between hostile, benevolent, and implicit sexism, and reproductive rights attitudes, as well as support for the #MeToo Movement. In Study 2 we use data from the American National Election Study ($n = 4,270$) to examine the relationship between hostile and modern sexism and attitudes on abortion, equal pay, and paid family leave. Overall, these results reveal a complicated relationship between different conceptualizations of sexism and gendered attitudes, underscoring the need to consider how different forms of sexism shape broader social and political views, from both a normative perspective for societal change and a measurement approach for research precision.

Keywords: sexism, policy attitudes, measurement, gender, ambivalent sexism, gender equality

INTRODUCTION

Politics can be a masculine enterprise, both historically and presently around the world. For many decades, feminist scholars and activists have identified and criticized the gendered structures and attitudes that lead to sexist policies and exclusion of women from political spaces. After the U.S. election of Donald Trump, an election that featured the first major party woman nominee and a candidate that frequently made sexist remarks, and the advent of social movements like #MeToo, more researchers began exploring the role of sexism and gender attitudes in American politics. Sexism batteries became more commonly included in large surveys like the American National Election Study (ANES) and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). Prior to 2016, these surveys had inconsistently included survey questions tapping sexist attitudes (Schaffner, 2021). The focus of much of the empirical research was the impact of sexism on vote choice. Even when controlling for partisanship, sexism is a powerful predictor of vote choice (Valentino et al., 2018), and hostile sexism, in particular, is connected to Trump support in 2016

(Ratliff et al., 2017; Cassese and Holman, 2019). We know less about the implications of different forms of sexism on public opinion and policy attitudes, particularly those that are explicitly and implicitly gendered. Moving beyond the electoral context and candidate support, we consider how different manifestations of sexism impact political attitudes and demonstrate that parsing out benevolent, hostile, modern, and implicit sexism may help us better understand why the connection between gender attitudes and issues like abortion have been mixed (Strickler and Danigelis, 2002; Jelen, 2015).

We build on an area of research that conceptualizes sexism and the opposition to gender equality as a way of justifying male dominance and maintaining existing gender relations (Jost and Kay, 2005; Cassese and Holman, 2019). All forms of sexism contribute to the maintenance of the gender status quo, but variation in these types of attitudes result in varying support for gender-related policies. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory delineates hostile and benevolent sexism as distinct forms of prejudice (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Additionally, we explore the role of implicit sexism, prejudiced attitudes held at the nonconscious level (Jost et al., 2004). Because of the social desirability some people may exhibit in the presentation of sexist survey items, implicit tests of gender stereotypes can influence people's attitudes toward female candidates above and beyond their explicitly stated gender preferences (Mo, 2015).

The connection between sexism and gender attitudes and policy positions seems straightforward. We would expect that those who hold sexist attitudes would be less likely to support progressive policies with expressly gendered implications. In some policy areas, this direct connection appears to exist. However, in the gender-salient domain of reproductive rights, the association between sexism and gender attitudes is less clear and has only been somewhat elucidated by separating *hostile* from *benevolent* forms of sexism (Begun and Walls, 2015; Huang et al., 2016; Hodson and MacInnis, 2017; Petterson and Sutton, 2018).

Using an original survey and data from the ANES, we test whether and when hostile, benevolent, modern, and implicit sexism predict attitudes toward gendered public opinion issues and policy attitudes. We argue that all forms of sexism contribute to the subjugation of women in society. However, there are important nuances in different manifestations of sexism that have implications for public opinion and policy attitudes. Our results across the studies are considerable to unpack but the biggest takeaway is that sexism is not a uniformly negative predictor of progressive gender attitudes. We find that benevolent sexism was positively related to support for the #MeToo Movement whereas hostile sexism was a strong negative predictor. This reflects the fact that hostile sexism uncovers antipathy toward women while benevolent sexism taps the idea that women are morally superior and purer than men and should therefore be protected. We find that hostile sexism predicts less support for abortion and birth control access, as well as funding for Planned Parenthood. In our second study, we replicate these findings on abortion but find that modern sexism, not hostile, is related to less support for equal pay and paid leave policies. We also argue that sexism researchers should consider that the relationship between sexism and different political outcomes may be conditional on gender.

We see in our data that for men, benevolent sexism does not always predict less progressive gendered policy attitudes, but it does for women. Although our data cannot speak to the exact mechanisms that connect different forms of sexism to policy and public opinion attitudes, we show that this connection does exist but is conditional on the type of sexism measured. Our results also underscore the need for more research aimed at understanding the antecedents and consequences of different forms of sexist attitudes.

THEORY

How We Measure Sexism

Though empirical research on sexism and political outcomes like vote choice has proliferated in recent years, particularly after the U.S. election of Donald Trump, feminist activists and theorists have long discussed the role of sexist institutions and attitudes in stymying gender equality in education, pay, healthcare, and in politics. Feminist theorists have highlighted the ways in which sexism exists in institutionally structured settings, such as when women are paid less than men for the same labor, but also sexism in interpersonal interactions and even in the private sphere of the home (Okin, 1989; Nussbaum, 1998; Swim et al., 2001). Both forms of sexism reinforce existing gendered systems of dominance and subordination. Gender inequalities are often the result of sexism, but sexism also constitutes tacit beliefs and attitudes that individuals hold. Research in the social sciences in the 1980s and 90s began to try and measure these attitudes. We constructed **Table 1** to define the main types of sexism measures used in social science research.

According to Glick and Fiske (1996), sexism is an ambivalent form of prejudice in which antipathy toward women who seek to undermine male dominance coexists with the idealization of women who occupy the roles carved out for them in the patriarchal system—wives, mothers, and homemakers in need of male protection (Glick and Fiske, 2001). Glick and Fiske (1996) introduced the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory that captured the way in which negative gender attitudes can be actively hostile but also paternalistic and patronizing. This measure reflects the fact that cultural representations of women, throughout history, have not always been strictly negative (Eagly and Mladinic, 1994). Women are represented as caregivers and housewives whose role is primarily within the domestic sphere. However, women are also subject to negative stereotypes and bias, particularly when they step outside of domestic roles. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory reflects the duality of these cultural representations and stereotypes. The first dimension, *hostile sexism*, defines women as a group in competition with men, vying for social dominance. Someone who holds strong hostile sexist attitudes believes that women are inferior to men and, thus, incapable, and unworthy of power. As a result, this person is hostile toward women who do not accept their assigned roles in the patriarchy and perceive calls for gender equality as a ploy to usurp men's power and assert dominance over men. In contrast, the second dimension, *benevolent sexism,* adopts a more positive, but ultimately patronizing and paternalistic view of women. It shares with hostile sexism the notion that women are not capable of

	Definition	References
Modern sexism	Involves the denial of gender-based discrimination and a resentment or disapproval of policies to address inequalities between men and women	Swim et al., 1995; Swim and Cohen, 1997
Old-fashioned sexism	Belief that women are generally inferior to men, less logical, and traditional gender roles should be adhered to	Swim et al., 1995; Morrison et al., 1999
Hostile sexism (ASI)	Part of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory- support for traditional gender roles, sees women in competition with men for social dominance	Glick and Fiske, 1996
Benevolent sexism (ASI)	Part of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory- involves belief that women should be protected and cherished by men; women are morally superior, but men should still generally wield power	Glick and Fiske, 1996; Chaiken and Trope, 1999; Mo, 2015
Implicit Sexism	Builds off of the dual process model—the idea that our actions, thoughts, attitudes, and decisions are influenced by conscious and non-conscious processes that occur simultaneously. These are sexist attitudes that are at the unconscious level of awareness.	

wielding power, and because of this, they require protection by men. As separate dimensions of sexism, individuals can be low on both (non-sexists) and high on both (ambivalent sexists), but they can also be high on one dimension and low on another. Hostile sexists are those who only see women as a threat to men's power, while benevolent sexist tend to simply see women as fragile, precious, and possessing moral superiority (Glick and Fiske, 1996).

The modern sexism measure was specifically constructed to capture attitudes that deny the existence of systematic discrimination against women (Swim et al., 1995). The development of this measure coincided with discussions in popular culture and feminist discourse about backlash against modern feminism (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Many critics of feminist movements hold the belief that we live in a post-feminist world in which equality has already been achieved (Anderson, 2015). These beliefs resulted in a cultural backlash against many of the advances achieved by feminism in the 1970s (Faludi, 1991). Contrary to traditional sexism, which openly endorses the idea that women are inferior to men, modern sexism is a subtler form of prejudice that involves a resentment toward demands for gender inequality. Individuals who hold modern sexist attitudes often feel negatively about the shifting roles of women in society. In analyses of the comparability of different sexism measures, the items on the modern sexism scale have been found to load together with hostile sexism items, although modern sexism items tapping antagonism and resentment more closely mapped onto hostile sexism than the items tapping denial of gender discrimination (Schaffner, 2021). A less frequently used scale is the Old-Fashioned Sexism Scale, also constructed by Swim et al. (1995). Modeled after the Old-Fashioned Racism scale, this scale measures blatant expressions of sexism like believing that men are smarter and more logical than women.

These varying patterns of sexist attitudes often have different attitudinal and behavioral implications. For example, hostile sexism is correlated with negative attitudes toward women in managerial positions whereas benevolent sexism is not (Masser and Abrams, 2004; Eagly and Carlie, 2007). Hostile sexists are more likely to condone violence toward women, including rape (Begany and Milburn, 2002; Masser et al., 2006), whereas benevolent sexists react negatively toward overtly crude,

hostile treatment of women (Cassese and Holman, 2019). This is not surprising given that some studies have found only a weak positive correlation or no correlation between these two measures (Glick and Fiske, 2011). However, the mixture of negatively putatively positive stereotypes that make up hostile and benevolent sexism create "complementary gender stereotypes" that offer a justification for gender inequality (Jost and Kay, 2005). In addition, individuals need not be fully aware that they hold sexist stereotypes. Notions that women's roles are confined to being homemakers and mothers can be internalized and held at the nonconscious "implicit" level (Jost et al., 2004). When people formulate an attitude or a behavioral intention, their minds first draw on a network of nonconscious processes that serve as a starting point for conscious thought (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999; Lodge and Taber, 2013). Sometimes these intuitions are incorporated into people's attitudes and behavior without much consideration and guide people's political decisions outside of people's awareness (Arceneaux and Vander Wielen, 2017).

Sexism in American Politics

Much of the literature on sexism in American politics has focused on the ways in which sexist attitudes and stereotypes impact women political candidates (Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Bauer, 2015; Mo, 2015; Cassese and Holman, 2017). Though our main focus is on attitudes toward gendered policies, understanding the prevalence of sexism aimed at women in public life is helpful for investigating how else this prejudice is likely to spill over into policy preferences. Because partisanship is the strongest lever in American political behavior, there is a complicated relationship between sexism and candidate evaluation and vote choice, but ultimately research shows that when women run for office, particularly at higher levels, they face gender bias (Lawless, 2004; Paul and Smith, 2008). Vote choice chiefly comes down to incumbency and partisanship (Dolan, 2014), but gender stereotyping and sexism still play a role in electoral politics (Schneider and Bos, 2014) and often lead voters to have different standards of evaluation for men and women politicians (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2014; Barnes et al., 2020). Cassese and Barnes (2018) find that despite the blatant sexism present in the 2016 presidential race, many

white women endorsed sexist beliefs, and these beliefs informed their vote choice. Both modern and traditional sexism were significant predictors of an individual's presidential vote in 2016 (Knuckey, 2019), and both hostile and benevolent sexists punish women politicians involved in sex scandals more than non-sexists (Barnes et al., 2020). Relatedly, concerns about gender discrimination predict support for a woman president (Huddy and Carey, 2009), and denials of this discrimination are associated with opposition to women politicians like Hillary Clinton (Sulfaro, 2007; Tesler and Sears, 2010; McThomas and Tesler, 2016) and the gender gap in partisanship (Simas and Bumgardner, 2017).

Indeed, women in the electorate are not immune from the influence of sexism in their politics. Personal experiences of sexism and sexual harassment can actually motivate political engagement (Bankert, 2020). Similarly, Hansen and Dolan (2020) find that women who reported being sexual harassed at work were more likely to mobilize. The broader #MeToo Movement, in which issues of sexual harassment and assault were brought to the forefront of American politics, also may have influenced increased participation among women (Dittmar, 2020). Sexism, in women's public and private lives, has also contributed to the gender gap in political interest and engagement (Carroll, 1989; Burns et al., 2001).

Importantly for our purposes, the type of sexism exposure matters. Experiencing hostile sexism can motivate engagement in collective action whereas benevolent sexism seems to decrease this interest (Becker and Wright, 2011). For those who *hold* sexist attitudes, hostile sexists who were exposed to sexist attacks against Hillary Clinton showed increased support for Trump and decreased support for Clinton, while benevolent sexists exposed to the same attack responded with increased support for Clinton (Cassese and Holman, 2019).

The Impact of Sexism on Policy Attitudes

Sexism not only impacts outcomes like vote choice and evaluations of political candidates, but it can impact attitudes, particularly political opinions that are gender salient. For example, modern sexism is associated with a denial of discrimination against women and a lack of support for policies designed to help women in the domains of education and the workplace (Swim et al., 1995). Hideg et al. (2016) find that benevolent sexism is associated with more support for employment equity policies supporting women, but this support did not extend into more stereotypically masculine workplace settings. Hostile sexists are less likely to support the adoption of gender quotas to increase women's representation in politics, whereas benevolent sexists are more likely to support these policies even though they do not support gender equality generally (Beauregard and Sheppard, 2021). Hostile sexism predicts victim-blaming attributions for the gender gap in income inequality (Connor and Fiske, 2019) as well as opposition to breastfeeding in public (Huang et al., 2020) and tolerance for sexual harassment (Russell and Trigg, 2004). Modern sexist attitudes are related to the belief that sexual harassment is not pervasive, the notion that the #MeToo Movement has gone too far, and opposition to workplace harassment training (Archer

and Kam, 2021). Recent research even shows that sexism can impact compliance with public health measures, with higher levels of benevolent sexism actually increasing compliance (Chen and Farhart, 2020). This work is all in contrast to earlier research that failed to find definitive connections between sexism and gender-salient policy attitudes (Twenge, 1997), likely because measures of sexism now capture more subtle forms of gender-based prejudices.

Within the domain of reproductive rights, one of the most gender-salient policy areas, the connection between gender attitudes, sexism, and support for access to abortion and birth control is inconsistent (Jelen and Wilcox, 2003; Patel and Johns, 2009; Barkan, 2014). Some scholars find a positive correlation between opposition to abortion and both forms of ambivalent sexism, hostile and benevolent (Hodson and MacInnis, 2017), while others find only evidence for a correlation between abortion attitudes and benevolent sexism (Huang et al., 2016) or hostile sexism (Petterson and Sutton, 2018). These inconclusive findings may arise from the fact that most of these studies come from small convenience samples collected on college campuses, and they all focus on a relatively limited definition of reproductive rights—namely, abortion. People's attitudes about abortion tend to be relatively crystalized and heavily linked to moral absolutes (Wilcox and Norrander, 2002; Jelen and Wilcox, 2003; Mooney and Schuldt, 2008; Jelen, 2014; Ryan, 2014), whereas broader policy attitudes about women's reproductive rights, such as access to birth control, may be more malleable (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009).

Furthermore, gender identity and sexist attitudes may not supersede other identities like race and ethnicity. Women feel closer links to men of their race than their women peers of other groups (Junn, 1997; Gay and Tate, 1998). Compared to other groups, women's levels of group consciousness tend to be lower (Clayton and Crosby, 1992), which in part explains why they lack the political cohesion that other historically marginalized groups display (Cassese and Barnes, 2018). In U.S. politics, accounting for racial identity demonstrates that the supposed "gender gap" in women preferring Democratic to Republican candidates disappears, with white women selecting Republican presidents in an overwhelming majority of previous elections (Junn and Masuoka, 2020). White women are more likely to vote and prefer policies connected to their race and partisanship over their gender (Cassese and Barnes, 2018), and Black women also politically engage in ways more consistent with linked fate toward their racial rather than gender group (Stout and Tate, 2013). Thus, an intersectional lens is necessary to fully understand the experiences and preferences of women, particularly of Black American women (Crenshaw, 1989; Hancock, 2007; Brown, 2014). Indeed, attitudes on reproductive rights in the U.S. differ across racial/ethnic groups as well as religious affiliations (Smith, 2013; Jelen, 2014; Lizotte, 2015; Holman et al., 2020). The rich body of literature on intersectionality is necessary to understand how sexism operates in society, but there is less work on empirically connecting measures of sexism to intersectionality (see Junn and Masuoka, 2020 for discussion on how variation in socioeconomic and religious indicators matter more for the white woman vote). One of the challenges is

the small sample problem—that most "representative" samples of American adults do not include enough participants from minority racial/ethnic groups to conduct meaningful analyses. Of course, this is the limitation of quantitative work that attempts to wedge intersectional theory into a model (Hancock, 2007). Nevertheless, there has been some recent research demonstrating that Black men and women are more likely to endorse benevolent sexism attitudes, as compared to white men and women (Davis et al., 2022), but we do not know how this plays out in public opinion of policy issues.

Previous literature in psychology and sociology has shed light on the relationship between sexism and a range of attitudes. Political science research, particularly since the 2016 U.S. election, has increasingly considered the role of sexism in shaping both vote choice and public opinion with a notable uptick in the number of articles in political science journals focusing on sexism (Schaffner, 2021). However, the scales used across studies often differ with some scholars using the full ASI scale (Cassese and Holman, 2019), while other studies rely on only the hostile sexism items from the ASI (Schaffner et al., 2018; Valentino et al., 2018). Furthermore, much of this literature describes the role of sexism in shaping vote choice. Our contribution is three-fold: First, we expand the dependent variables to consider how sexism may correlate with public opinion. We look at not only abortion, but also birth control, support for #Me Too, equal pay, and paid leave. Second, we do not assume that there is one pattern of sexist attitudes that can shape social and political views and instead look at how different measures of sexism predict gendered political attitudes. We utilize the measures of sexism that are most commonly used in political science: hostile, benevolent, and modern as well as an implicit measure of sexism to capture sexist attitudes that may exist outside of one's conscious awareness. Finally, we improve on previous research by leveraging two large representative samples.

Expectations

All manifestations of sexism, in some way, contribute to the maintenance of the gender status quo. However, sexism takes many different forms, and there are reasons to expect that different sexist attitudes may have differential impacts on public opinion and policy attitudes, particularly those that are expressly gendered. Hostile sexism is perhaps the least subtle form of sexism as it involves open hostility and resentment toward women and gender equality. Modern sexism, which also involves antagonistic attitudes toward women and demands for equality, is closely related to hostile sexism and sometimes characterized as comparable scales (Valentino et al., 2018; Schaffner, 2021). Therefore, we expect:

H_1: Hostile and modern sexism will have a significant and negative effect on support for gendered policy attitudes.

A fundamental feature of hostile sexism is the desire to maintain men's power (Cross et al., 2019). Hostile sexists express antagonistic and aggressive views about women and gender equality, positing that women are constantly vying for the social advantages, resources, and privileges that men have (Glick et al., 2000). Research has shown that hostile sexism is associated

with negative evaluations of women in managerial positions, feminists, and in other roles that are deemed "non-traditional" (Glick et al., 1997; Masser and Abrams, 2004). We expect hostile sexism to be negatively correlated with expanded reproductive rights, including increased access to birth control and abortion, because the ability for women to have more control over their reproductive lives directly contradicts hostile sexist beliefs about women's subordinate status in society and affirms the belief that women are out to compete against men and vie for social dominance. Similarly, we theorize that hostile sexism will be negatively related to policies like paid leave and equal pay because of the antagonistic views about women that undergird hostile sexism.

Modern sexism is correlated with hostile sexism, though notably the modern sexism items that tap antagonistic and resentful attitudes toward women more closely map onto hostile sexism than the items focused on the denial of gender discrimination (Schaffner, 2021). We also expect that modern sexism will be associated with lower levels of support for reproductive rights, paid leave, and equal pay. Although these issues differ, they all involve pushing back against gender discrimination in some facet and the assumption that women face unequal conditions. Modern sexists do not believe that any gender inequalities stem from systemic discrimination and therefore would be unlikely to believe women deserve "special treatment" in the form of expanded reproductive rights or government intervention into ensuring equal pay and paid leave.

On the other hand, while benevolent sexist attitudes still ultimately uphold the gender status quo and male dominance, it is possible that these attitudes create cross pressures and competing considerations as it relates to gendered policy attitudes. For example, Hideg et al. (2016) find that benevolent sexism was associated with more support for employment equity policies for women, but this support disappeared when the workplace domain was stereotypically masculine, and those with high levels of benevolent sexist attitudes are more likely to support gender quota policies to increase women's presence in politics than those with low levels of benevolent sexism (Beauregard and Sheppard, 2021). This support stemmed from the belief that women need the help and protection of gender quotas to achieve success in politics and not from a belief in gender equality. Overall, benevolent sexism is associated with support for gender-based affirmative action in the workplace, but this association is based in the belief that women need assistance to be successful (Sibley and Perry, 2010). With certain topics, the desire to "protect" women may clash with the desire to maintain male dominance and uphold traditional gender roles. Therefore, we expect:

H_2: Benevolent sexism will have a significant and negative effect on support for gendered policy attitudes.

Ultimately, we still expect benevolent sexism to be negatively related to support for abortion, birth control access, Planned Parenthood funding, and the #MeToo Movement, even though cross pressures may exist. Though benevolent sexist attitudes are putatively positive in tone, these attitudes still serve to restrict women to traditional roles like caregivers

and homemakers. Furthermore, a major assumption of benevolent sexists is that women are purer than men and morally superior (Glick and Fiske, 1996). This ideology also idealized women as nurturing mothers which may lead to less support for reproductive rights, as past research has shown (Huang et al., 2014).

We also explore the connection between implicit sexism and various gendered policy attitudes. Measured at the unconscious level, this type of bias occurs outside of our awareness and reflects the automatic associations we have attached to objects/words. Even those who do not report hostile or benevolent sexist attitudes can still be implicitly sexist, and when we only measure explicit attitudes, we risk missing a dimension of people's gender attitudes. We test whether this more subtle and inadvertent form of sexism can impact gendered attitudes. There is little research connecting implicit sexism to policy attitudes, but we know that implicit gender attitudes can impact support for women candidates (Mo, 2015), and other work has used implicit measures to elucidate the connection between implicit bias and attitudes toward immigration (Malhotra et al., 2012; Kroll, 2013), as well as implicit racism and support for voter ID laws (Banks and Hicks, 2016). We expect that the connection between implicit sexism and attitudes that are expressly gendered will be conditional on the strength of an issue attitude. For example, abortion is one of the few policy areas in which people have consistent attitudes, and these attitudes across the American population have been stable over time (Wilcox and Norrander, 2002; Jelen and Wilcox, 2003). It is unlikely that implicit sexism would impact relatively stable abortion attitudes that are more likely to be informed by explicit manifestations of sexism. Furthermore, abortion attitudes are closely linked to partisan identification (Killian, 2008; Levendusky, 2009). However, implicit sexism may impact attitudes on issues where opinions might be less crystallized like access to birth control.

H_3: Implicit sexism will have a significant and negative effect on support for gendered policy attitudes with the exception of abortion.

In some ways, we would logically expect that women would be more likely to support gender-salient policies. Women tend to express fewer sexist attitudes than men (Cowie et al., 2019), and these policies are more likely to directly impact their lives. However, women also are capable of holding sexist and gender system-justifying attitudes. Although women tend to express fewer sexist attitudes than men, some women buy into hostile and benevolent stereotypes as a way to "…justify and maintain the status quo" (Jost and Kay, 2005, p. 498). As noted above, gender identity is less politically influential relative to identities like race and ethnicity. Furthermore, past research has found a lack of gender differences in support for public opinion issues that have a disproportionate impact on women (Sapiro, 2003; Lizotte, 2015). Given this mixed evidence, we remain agnostic about whether the effect of sexist attitudes on gender-salient public opinion issues will be conditional on gender.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study 1
Sample
To explore the relationship between sexism and gender salient policy attitudes, we recruited 1,400 respondents *via* the survey platform Prolific to take part in a "Gender Identity and Political Attitudes" survey in the Winter of 2018. Unlike publicly available survey data, our survey included multiple measures of explicit sexism, a measure of implicit sexism, as well as various measures of reproductive rights attitudes. Participants were paid $1.50 to take part in the 10-minute long study. The benefit of using Prolific is that they have algorithms in place to fairly allocate study spaces, decreasing the issue of non-naïve participants (Chandler et al., 2014). The sample was 50.1% men and 48.3% women. The mean age was 35.6, 74.4% of the sample were white, 5.4% were Black, 3.1% were Latino/a or Hispanic, 6.9% were Asian, 0.5% were Native American, 9.7% identified as multiracial and the median income was "Between $50,000 and $64,999." Full demographic information can be found in the **Appendix**.

Measures
Participants first consented to the study and then responded to demographic questions, a 20-item Big Five personality battery (Donnellan et al., 2006), a Social Dominance Orientation battery (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999), as well as the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The Bem Sex Role Inventory is a commonly used measure of gender expression and gender roles. All participants completed the Gender-Career Implicit Association Test (IAT). The purpose of the IAT is to measure implicit gender attitudes in a way that is not subject to social desirability bias. In the congruent task, participants had to match up common male names with words related to work and careers and match up common female names with words related to family and home life. In the incongruent task, participants had to match male names with words related to family and home life and female names with words related to work and careers. The resulting D-Score measure is computed based on the difference in performance speeds between the two classification tasks. To compute the D-Score, we used the improved IAT algorithm specified in Greenwald et al. (2003) and the IAT package in R. Participants completed five items from both the Hostile and Benevolent sexism scales in the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Alpha values indicate a high reliability for both the hostile subscale (*Cronbach's Alpha = 0.92*) and the benevolent subscale (*Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84*). All items were coded such that higher values indicated a more sexist response. A mean composite score was generated for each subscale by averaged responses across the items that ranged from 1 (not sexist) to 5 (sexist). The hostile and benevolent scales were moderately correlated with each other (r= 0.47), while the hostile and implicit sexism (D-score) ($r = 0.05$) and benevolent and implicit sexism (D-score) ($r = 0.05$) were not correlated.

To measure abortion attitudes, participates were asked "Under the following conditions, do you think pregnant women should be allowed to obtain a legal abortion…" The nine conditions

Study 1 regression results.

	Dependent variable			
	Abortion	**Birth control**	**Planned parenthood**	**#MeToo**
Age	−0.056** (0.027)	−0.023 (0.022)	−0.055 (0.036)	−0.058* (0.031)
Women	−0.006 (0.011)	0.053*** (0.009)	0.041*** (0.015)	0.033** (0.013)
White	−0.0004 (0.012)	0.012 (0.010)	0.00004 (0.017)	0.032** (0.014)
Religiosity	−0.216*** (0.018)	−0.102*** (0.015)	−0.212*** (0.025)	0.044** (0.021)
Income	0.066*** (0.020)	0.019 (0.016)	0.003 (0.027)	0.061*** (0.023)
Education	0.013 (0.021)	−0.032* (0.018)	−0.074** (0.029)	0.008 (0.025)
Conservative	−0.472*** (0.022)	−0.269*** (0.018)	−0.438*** (0.030)	−0.383*** (0.025)
Implicit	0.002 (0.016)	−0.018 (0.013)	−0.080*** (0.021)	−0.006 (0.018)
Hostile	−0.080*** (0.024)	−0.205*** (0.020)	−0.325*** (0.033)	−0.424*** (0.028)
Benevolent	−0.068** (0.026)	−0.017 (0.021)	−0.069* (0.035)	0.167*** (0.030)
Constant	0.980*** (0.022)	0.963*** (0.018)	1.151*** (0.030)	0.839*** (0.026)
Observations	1,349	1,349	1,349	1,347
R^2	0.476	0.427	0.436	0.384
Adjusted R^2	0.472	0.423	0.432	0.379
Residual std. error	0.190 (df = 1338)	0.155 (df = 1,338)	0.257 (df = 1,338)	0.220 (df = 1,336)
F statistic	121.329*** (df = 10; 1,338)	99.683*** (df = 10; 1,338)	103.469*** (df = 10; 1,338)	83.304*** (df = 10; 1,336)

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

ranged from "If the pregnancy was caused by rape" to "If the pregnancy was caused by a casual encounter." The full battery of conditions can be found in the **Appendix**. All items were coded such that higher values indicated more support for abortion access. A mean composite score was generated by averaging response across all nine items (*Cronbach's Alpha = 0.*94). To tap birth control attitudes, participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: (1) The government should make it easier for women to obtain birth control, (2) Single women should not be able to obtain birth control (reverse-coded), and (3) Men should have no say in a woman's decision about birth control. Items were coded such that higher values indicated more support for birth control access and a mean composite score was generated by average responses across the three items (*Cronbach's Alpha = 0.*51). Finally, participants were asked on a five-point scale how much they agreed with the federal government cutting off funding for Planned Parenthood (explained in the survey as a non-profit organization that provided sexual health care) with higher values indicating more support for Planned Parenthood funding. They were also asked how much they approved of the #MeToo Movement with higher values indicating more support.

Controls

Several different control variables were measured to account for other factors that may influence the outcomes in which we are interested. We controlled for age, gender, income, education, religiosity, race, and ideology as we may expect younger people, women, those who have higher incomes and are more educated, as well as liberals to be more supportive of various gendered public opinion issues. We controlled for religiosity with an item measuring the frequency of religious service attendance (Lizotte, 2015). Race was coded as a dummy

variable with white and non-white as the categories. All variables were recoded to range from 0 to 1 for ease of interpretation of the unstandardized coefficients.

RESULTS (STUDY 1)

To look at the relationship between sexism and gendered public opinion and policy attitudes, a total of four OLS regression models were estimated with results found in **Table 2** (Hlavac, 2022). For all models, we looked at the variance inflation factor (VIF) to detect multicollinearity given that the hostile and benevolent sexism measures are moderately correlated with each other. We found no evidence of significant multicollinearity in any of the models. The key independent variables were the three sexism measures. We looked at the impact of these variables as well as a set of controls on abortion and birth control attitudes, support for Planned Parenthood funding, and approval of the #MeToo Movement. Our first hypothesis was that hostile sexism would have a significant and negative effect on support for gendered public opinion and policy attitudes. Indeed, there was a significant, negative correlation between hostile sexism and less support for abortion access, birth control access, funding for Planned Parenthood, and the #MeToo Movement. **Figure 1** shows the marginal effect of hostile sexism on the dependent variables with continuous control variables set to their means and factors set to their reference categories. This is consistent with research that finds that hostile sexism predicts a variety of anti-egalitarian outcomes (Sakall, 2001; Murphy et al., 2011; Patev et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that benevolent sexism would be negatively related to support for gendered public opinion and policy attitudes. We find partial support for this hypothesis.
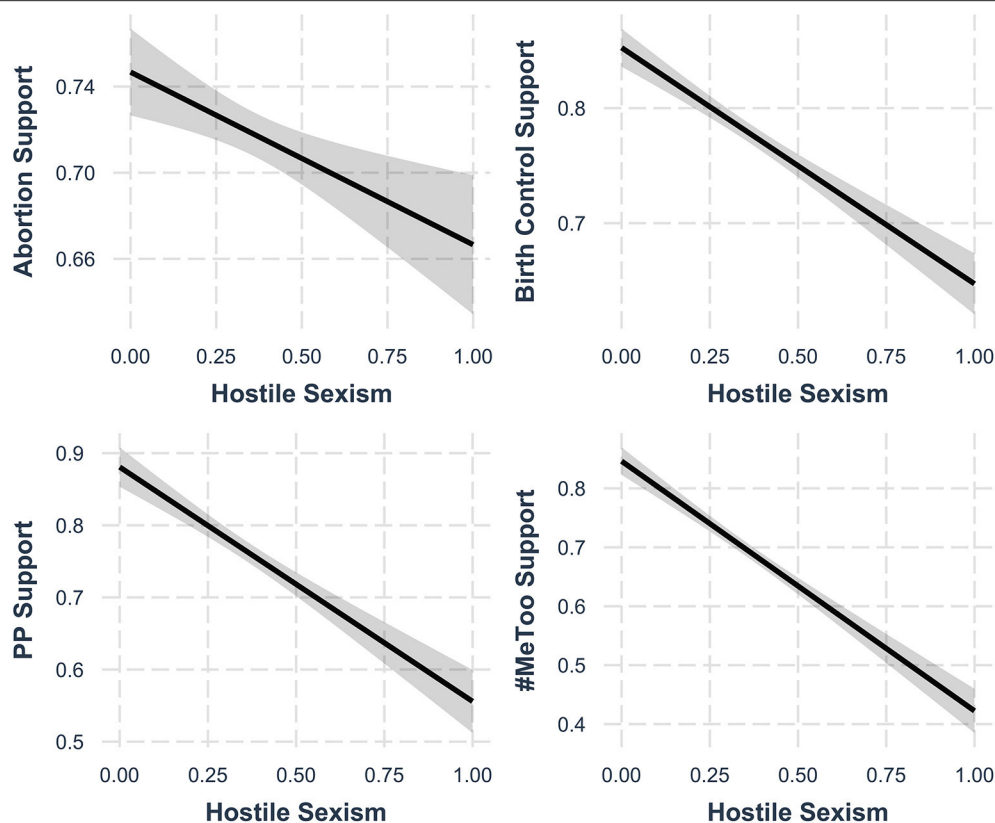
FIGURE 1 | Effects of hostile sexism.

Benevolent sexism is negatively related to abortion access and support for Planned Parenthood (p < 0.1), and the effects sizes are more modest than the effects of hostile sexism on these outcomes. Benevolent sexism was not significantly related to birth control attitudes, and contrary to theoretical expectations, benevolent sexism was positively correlated with support for the #MeToo Movement.

Finally, our third hypothesis predicted that implicit sexism, as measured with the implicit association test, would be negatively associated with support for gendered policy attitudes except for abortion. We only find partial support for this hypothesis as well. As expected, implicit sexism did not significantly predict abortion support. Implicit sexism was significantly related to Planned Parenthood access, with those higher in implicit sexism being less likely to support funding of Planned Parenthood. There was no significant relationship between implicit sexism and birth control attitudes or approval of the #MeToo Movement. **Figure 2** shows the marginal effect of benevolent sexism on support for abortion, Planned Parenthood, and #MeToo with continuous control variables set to their means and factors set to their reference categories. **Figure 3** displays the marginal effect of implicit sexism on support for Planned Parenthood. With respect to the control variables, age was negatively related to abortion attitudes and #MeToo support, being a woman was a positive and significant predictor of birth control attitudes, support for Planned Parenthood, and approval of the #MeToo

Movement, and church attendance was a negative predictor of support for abortion, birth control access, and Planned Parenthood. Interestingly, church attendance was positively related to approval of the #MeToo Movement. Income was positively related to abortion attitudes and approval of #MeToo, while education was negatively related to birth control and Planned Parenthood support. Unsurprisingly, ideology was a significant negative predictor of all four dependent variables, with conservatives less likely to support abortion and birth control access, funding for Planned Parenthood, and they were less likely to approve of the #MeToo Movement.

We also wanted to test whether the relationship between various measures of sexism and gendered policy attitudes are conditional on gender. We ran the same regression models described above but included interactions between gender and the three sexism scales. Full regression results can be found in **Table 3**. Again, the key independent variables were the three sexism measures. Regression results show that hostile sexism was significantly and negatively related to all four dependent variables. The interaction between gender and hostile sexism was positive and statistically significant for the birth control and Planned Parenthood models, indicating that the negative effect of hostile sexism is weaker for women as compared to men. The interaction between gender and benevolent sexism was negative and statistically significant when looking at abortion, birth control, and #MeToo attitudes. **Figure 4** depicts how
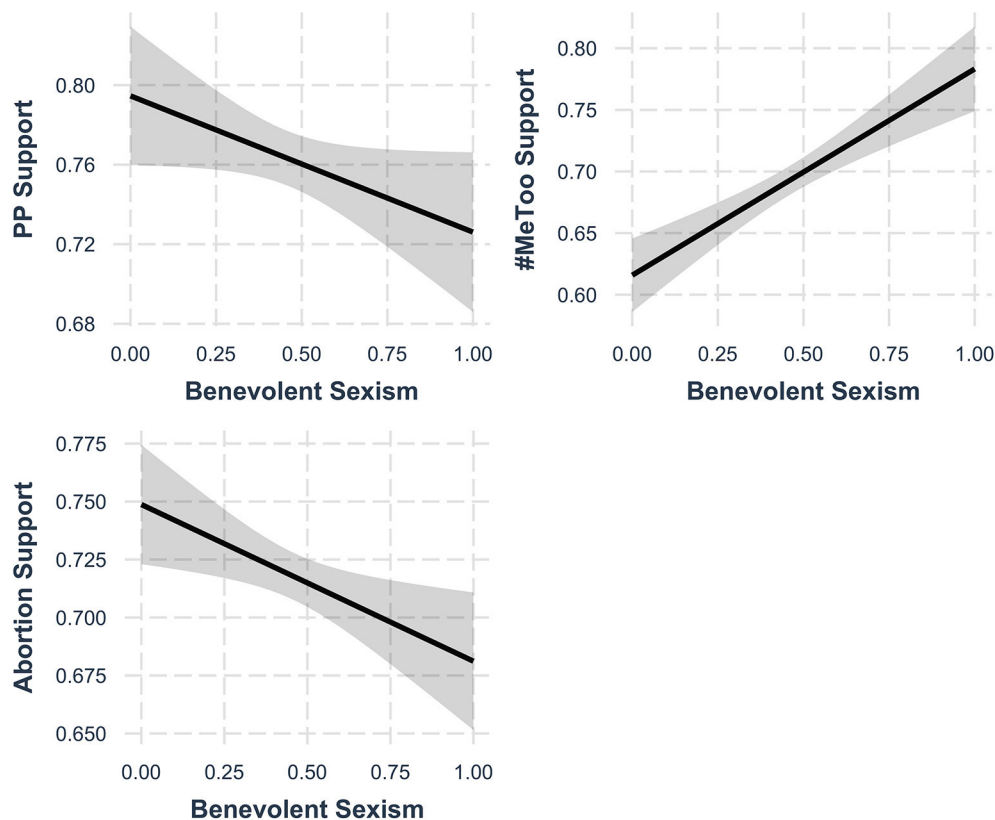
FIGURE 2 | Effects of benevolent sexism.
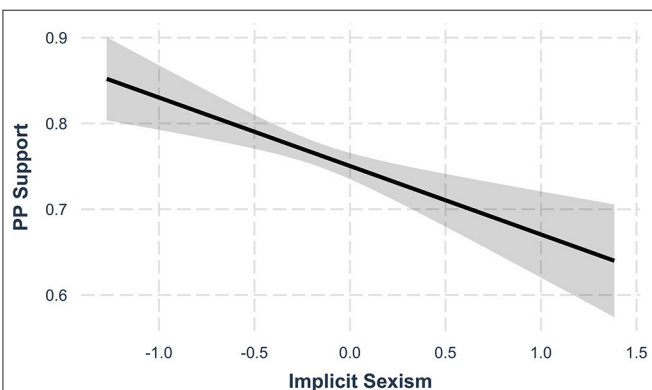
FIGURE 3 | Effects of implicit sexism.

gender moderates the relationship between benevolent sexism and these attitudes. We see that for men, levels of benevolent sexism have virtually no effect on support for abortion or birth control access. However, there is a significant and negative relationship between benevolent sexism and these attitudes for women. When it comes to #MeToo support, benevolent sexism is a significant and positive predictor for both men and

women, although it appears to be a slightly weaker relationship for women.

Study 2
Sample
While Study 1 allowed us to simultaneously estimate the effects of different measures, including implicit sexism, on attitudes toward reproductive rights, its main limitation is that it does not use a probability sample. Consequently, in Study 2, we use the nationally representative 2016 American National Election Study (n = 4,270) to replicate (partially) the findings on abortion attitudes in Study 1, and to extend our analysis to look at attitudes about equal pay and paid family leave. Reproductive rights issues may be a particular type of policy that taps into forms of sexism, but general equality of the sexes is at the heart of most sexist attitudes and debates. Thus, we are interested in better understanding what forms of sexism predict gendered workplace-related policies like equal pay and paid family leave (McBride and Parry, 2016). The ANES relies on a probability sample of eligible voters in the United States. The sample was 47.1% men and 52.9% women, and 71.7% white, 9.4% Black, 3.5% Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, 10.6% Hispanic, 0.6% Native American or Alaska Native, and 4.2% other or multi-racial. The median income was between $50,000 and $64,999. Full demographic information can be found in the **Appendix**.

TABLE 3 | Study 1 regression results with gender interaction.

	Dependent variable			
	Abortion	**Birth control**	**Planned parenthood**	**#MeToo**
Age	−0.054** (0.027)	−0.023 (0.022)	−0.058 (0.036)	−0.056* (0.031)
White	−0.004 (0.012)	0.011 (0.010)	0.004 (0.017)	0.029** (0.014)
Religiosity	−0.220*** (0.018)	−0.101*** (0.015)	−0.207*** (0.025)	0.042** (0.021)
Income	0.061*** (0.020)	0.018 (0.016)	0.006 (0.027)	0.058** (0.023)
Education	0.002 (0.021)	−0.033* (0.018)	−0.062** (0.029)	−0.001 (0.025)
Conservative	−0.462*** (0.022)	−0.269*** (0.018)	−0.450*** (0.030)	−0.374*** (0.026)
Implicit	0.001 (0.021)	−0.032* (0.017)	−0.078*** (0.029)	−0.016 (0.025)
Hostile	−0.056* (0.031)	−0.240*** (0.025)	−0.388*** (0.042)	−0.409** (0.036)*
Benevolent	0.012 (0.035)	0.021 (0.029)	−0.120** (0.047)	0.238*** (0.040)
Women	0.091*** (0.025)	0.066*** (0.021)	−0.058* (0.034)	0.116*** (0.029)
ImplicitXWomen	−0.010 (0.031)	0.028 (0.026)	0.004 (0.043)	0.013 (0.037)
HostileXWomen	−0.059 (0.046)	0.084** (0.038)	0.153** (0.063)	−0.037 (0.054)
BenevolentXWomen	−0.170*** (0.051)	−0.085** (0.042)	0.102 (0.069)	−0.150** (0.059)
Constant	0.939*** (0.024)	0.960*** (0.020)	1.196*** (0.033)	0.804*** (0.028)
Observations	1,349	1,349	1,349	1,347
R^2	0.484	0.430	0.442	0.389
Adjusted R^2	0.478	0.424	0.437	0.383
Residual std. error	0.189 (df = 1,335)	0.155 (df = 1,335)	0.256 (df = 1,335)	0.219 (df = 1,333)
F statistic	96.132*** (df = 13; 1335)	77.479*** (df = 13; 1335)	81.327*** (df = 13; 1335)	65.242*** (df = 13; 1333)

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.
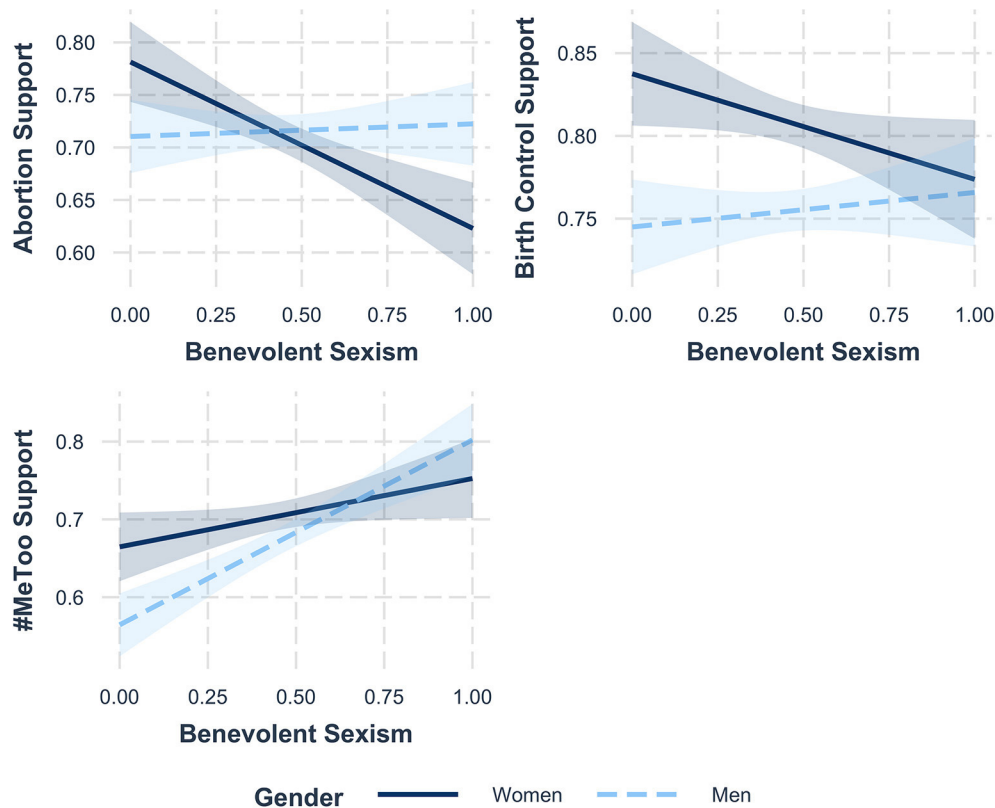
FIGURE 4 | Effects of benevolent sexism by gender.

Measures

The 2016 ANES uses several different measures to tap gender attitudes, including an abbreviated version of the hostile sexism subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick and Fiske, 1996). The benevolent sexism subscale was not included on the ANES. Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: (1) Many women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist; (2) Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them; (3) Women seek to gain power by getting control over men; and (4) Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she tries to put him on a tight leash. All items were coded such that higher values indicated a more sexist response (*Cronbach's Alpha = 0.7*9). The last two items were also measured in Study 1. The Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995) was included, which consists of three items: (1) How much attention should the media pay to discrimination against women?, (2) When women demand equality these days, how often are they actually seeking special favors?, and (3) When women complain about discrimination, how often do they cause more problems than they solve? All items were coded such that higher values indicated a more sexist response (Cronbach's Alpha = *0.65*). A mean composite score was generated for each subscale (hostile and modern) by averaging responses across the items. The hostile and modern scales were moderately correlated with each other (r = 0.42).

Finally, the ANES included the following question on abortion attitudes: "There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view?" Response categories were, (1) By law, abortion should never be permitted; (2) By law, only in case of rape, incest, or a woman's life in danger; (3) By law, for reasons other than rape, incest, or woman's life in danger if need established; (4) By law, abortion as a matter of personal choice. Response categories were coded such that higher scores indicated more liberal abortion attitudes. We also analyzed an item asking about equal pay, which was "Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring employers to pay women and men the same amount for the same work?" Our final dependent variable was an item regarding paid leave—"Do you favor/oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring employers to offer paid leave to parents of new children?" Response categories were coded such that higher values indicated more support.

Controls

We controlled for age, gender, race, religiosity, income, education, and ideology as we may expect younger people, women, those who have higher incomes and are more educated, as well as liberals to be more supportive of various gendered public opinion issues. All variables were recoded to range from 0 to 1 for ease of interpretation of the unstandardized coefficients.

RESULTS (STUDY 2)

To look at the relationship between sexism and gendered public opinion and policy attitudes, we estimated three OLS regression models, with results displayed in **Table 4**. For all models, we looked at the variance inflation factor (VIF) to detect multicollinearity given that the sexism measures are moderately correlated with each other. We found no evidence of multicollinearity in any of the models. The key independent variables were the two sexism measures. We looked at the impact of these variables, as well as a set of controls on abortion attitudes, equal pay, and paid leave. Our first hypothesis was that both hostile and modern sexism would have a significant and negative effect on support for gendered public opinion and policy attitudes. We find mixed support for this hypothesis. Consistent with our results from Study 1 and Hypothesis 1, hostile sexism was associated with less support for abortion access as well as equal pay. However, it was not a significant predictor of support for paid leave policies. **Figure 5** shows the marginal effect of hostile sexism on the dependent variables with continuous control variables set to their means and factors set to their reference categories. Again, consistent with our first hypothesis, modern sexism is related to reduced support for abortion, equal pay, and paid leave policies as displayed in **Figure 6**. With respect to the control variables, age had a positive and significant effect on support for abortion and equal pay, but a negative and significant effect on support for paid leave. Women were significantly more supportive of equal pay and paid leave policies and less supportive of abortion, church attendance was negatively related to abortion support, education was positively related to abortion support, and conservatism was associated with less support for all three dependent variables. Income was a positive and significant predictor of support for abortion.

Again, we were interested in whether the relationship between sexism and gendered policy attitudes is conditional on gender. Using the same analysis strategy as we used in Study 1, we estimated three regression models, interacting gender with both the hostile and modern sexism scales. Full regression results can be found below in **Table 5**. Contrary to our results in Study 1 in which the negative effect of hostile sexism on abortion support was weaker for women as compared to men, we do not see a significant interaction between gender and abortion support in this data. There was also no significant interaction between gender and hostile sexism when it came to paid leave and equal pay. Gender does appear to moderate the relationship between modern sexism and support for equal pay. More specifically, modern sexism was a weaker predictor of equal pay support for women as compared to men.

DISCUSSION

We know that the influence of sexism on candidate evaluations and vote choice has increased in the past decade (Cassese and Barnes, 2018; Valentino et al., 2018). Adding to this literature, we demonstrate that sexism may have an impact beyond the electoral context to inform a myriad of political attitudes, particularly those attitudes that have expressly gendered implications. Scholars have used various forms of sexism scales to predict political phenomena, creating a mixed pattern of findings that are difficult to compare and unpack. By simultaneously estimating the associations between multiple measures of sexism, including an implicit association test, and political attitudes, we

TABLE 4 | Study 2 regression results.

	Dependent variable		
	Abortion	**Equal pay**	**Paid leave**
Age	0.097***	0.081***	−0.225***
	(0.025)	(0.016)	(0.023)
Women	−0.025** (0.012)	0.046*** (0.008)	0.049*** (0.011)
White	0.022 (0.014)	0.022** (0.009)	−0.017 (0.013)
Religiosity	−0.349*** (0.025)	−0.013 (0.016)	0.011 (0.023)
Income	0.049** (0.020)	−0.023* (0.013)	0.001 (0.018)
Education	0.099*** (0.022)	−0.009 (0.014)	−0.022 (0.020)
Conservative	−0.540*** (0.026)	−0.046*** (0.017)	−0.181*** (0.024)
Modern	−0.155*** (0.031)	−0.286*** (0.020)	−0.254*** (0.029)
Hostile	−0.129*** (0.030)	−0.037* (0.019)	−0.028 (0.028)
Constant	1.134*** (0.029)	0.978*** (0.019)	1.025*** (0.027)
Observations	2,648	2,663	2,657
R^2	0.339	0.160	0.155
Adjusted R^2	0.337	0.157	0.153
Residual std. error	0.299 (df = 2,638)	0.194 (df = 2,653)	0.276 (df = 2,647)
F statistic	150.366*** (df = 9; 2,638)	56.028*** (df = 9; 2,653)	54.147*** (df = 9; 2,647)

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.
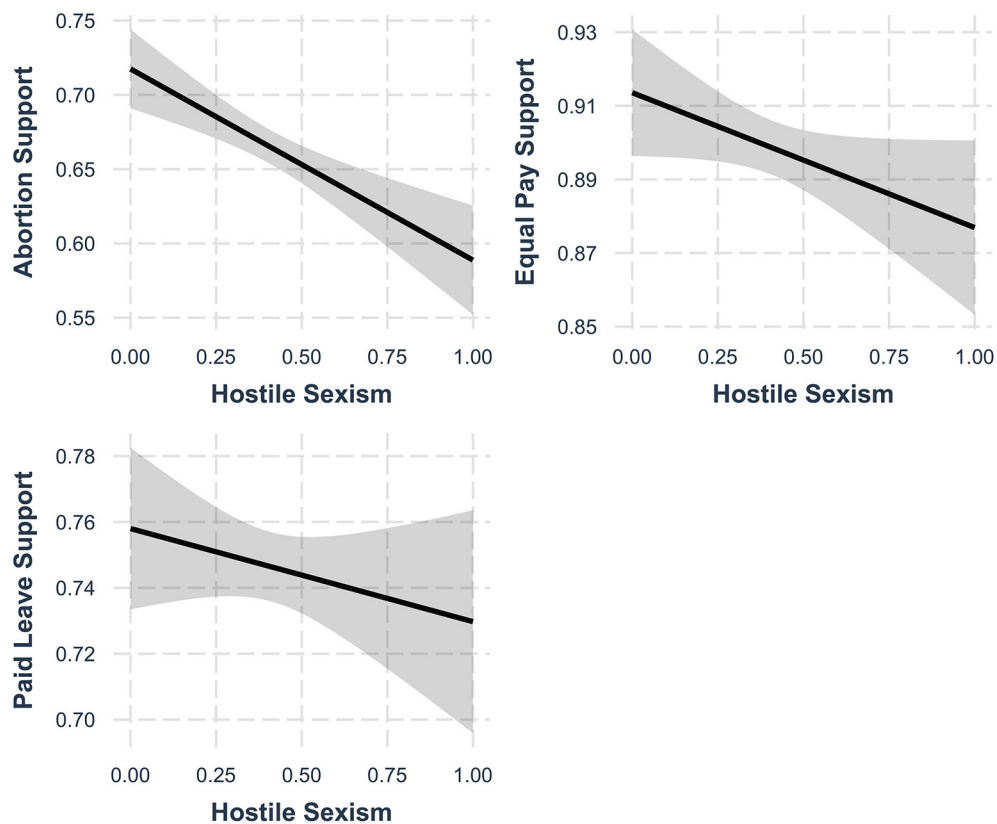
FIGURE 5 | Effects of hostile sexism.
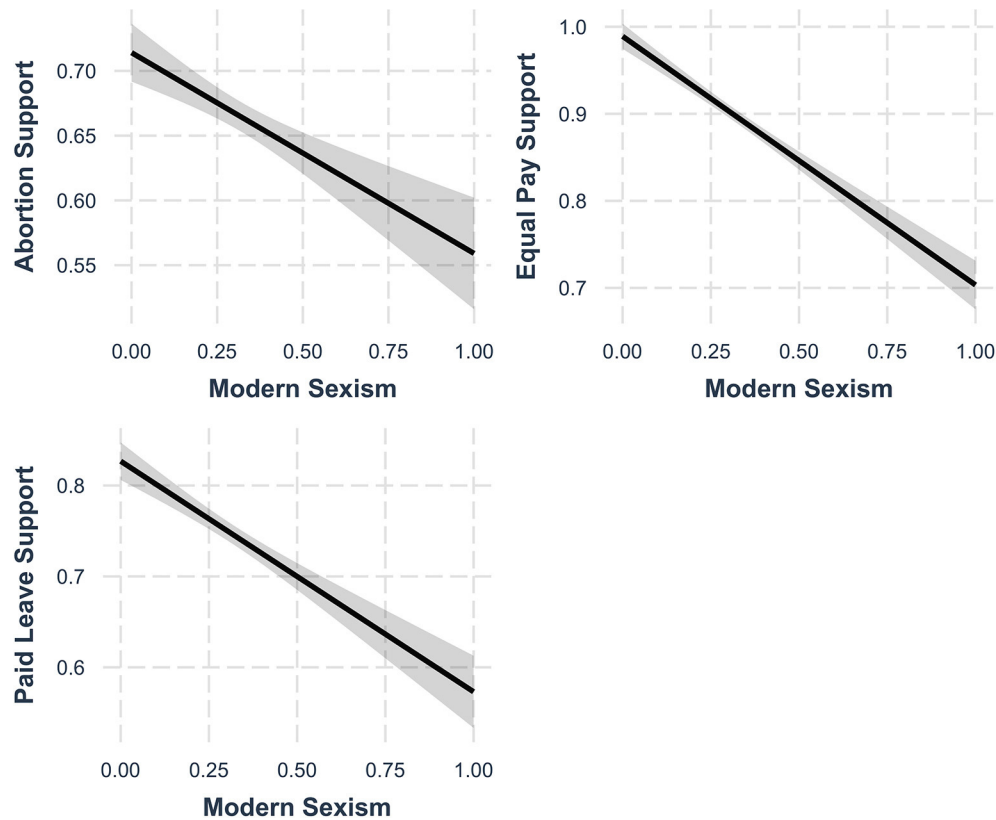
FIGURE 6 | Effects of modern sexism.

TABLE 5 | Study 1 regression results with gender interaction.

	Dependent variable		
	Abortion	**Equal pay**	**Paid leave**
Age	0.098*** (0.025)	0.080*** (0.016)	−0.225*** (0.023)
Women	0.020 (0.025)	0.018 (0.016)	0.032 (0.024)
White	0.022 (0.014)	0.022** (0.009)	−0.017 (0.013)
Religiosity	−0.348*** (0.025)	−0.013 (0.016)	0.011 (0.023)
Income	0.049** (0.020)	−0.022* (0.013)	0.001 (0.018)
Education	0.098*** (0.022)	−0.007 (0.014)	−0.021 (0.020)
Conservative	−0.539*** (0.026)	−0.046*** (0.016)	−0.181*** (0.024)
Modern	−0.144*** (0.041)	−0.342*** (0.027)	−0.280*** (0.038)
Hostile	−0.081* (0.042)	−0.027 (0.027)	−0.028 (0.038)
ModernXWomen	−0.023 (0.058)	0.117*** (0.037)	0.056 (0.053)
HostileXWomen	−0.093 (0.057)	−0.021 (0.037)	−0.001 (0.053)
Constant	1.109*** (0.031)	0.992*** (0.020)	1.034*** (0.029)
Observations	2,648	2,663	2,657
R^2	0.340	0.163	0.156
Adjusted R^2	0.337	0.160	0.152
Residual std. error	0.299 (df = 2636)	0.193 (df = 2651)	0.276 (df = 2645)
F statistic	123.513*** (df = 11; 2636)	46.958*** (df = 11; 2651)	44.412*** (df = 11; 2645)

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

contribute to efforts to understand the mechanisms at work underlying sexist attitudes and suggest that sexism indeed comes in many shades that have implications for particular policies. Our contribution underscores the need for scholars who are using sexism batteries to carefully consider the scales they choose and the accompanying underlying attitudes about women. In other words, are the items measuring a form of sexism motivated by antipathy toward women, opposition to gender equality, a motivation to maintain existing gender relations, or ideas about the moral superiority and purity of women?

Including the implicit sexism measure alongside explicit measures of sexist attitudes in our statistical models allows us to assess whether unconscious sexism is related to attitudes toward reproductive rights as well as address the concern of social desirability bias that could be present in people's responses to explicit sexism scales. Furthermore, by using the implicit test around gender roles like workplaces and the home, we contribute to our understanding of how separate spheres ideology impacts attitudes beyond workplace and domestic space equality (Miller and Borgida, 2016). Specifically, individuals who are more likely to associate women with the home and men with work likely hold a set of attitudes that suggest women should be mothers and, thus, be less supportive of women's reproductive freedom. It's also possible individuals may connect birth control to sexual behaviors like sex outside of marriage or multiple partners and oppose Planned Parenthood to further restrict women's sex lives (Friesen et al., 2017). Future research should consider measuring support for condom access or erectile dysfunction medication to further elicit the role of sexism in these domains related to men's sexuality.

Our findings suggest that often the relationship between sexism and support for gendered policy is fairly straightforward. In Study 1, we found that hostile sexism, regardless of gender, was related to less support for abortion access, birth control access, funding for Planned Parenthood, and support for the #MeToo Movement. This suggests that antipathy toward women and beliefs that women are in competition with men vying for social dominance, the hallmarks of hostile sexism, are associated with support for restricting reproductive rights. In our second study, we replicated the finding that hostile sexism is negatively related to support for abortion. However, hostile sexism was only marginally related to equal pay and was not associated with support for paid leave while modern sexism was a negative predictor of all three. Previous research has found that modern and hostile sexism are closely related but that the modern sexism items tapping antagonism and resentment more closely mapped onto hostile sexism than the items tapping denial of discrimination. Because the modern sexism items on the ANES were more focused on the denial of discrimination rather than antipathy toward women, this suggests that—at least with respect to equal pay and paid leave policies—the mechanism driving these attitudes is more about a denial that women face unequal conditions rather than overt hostility toward women.

We were also interested in the relationship between benevolent sexism, the other sub-scale in the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, and gendered attitudes. We found that benevolent

sexists were less likely to support abortion and Planned Parenthood. However, the significant interaction between gender and benevolent sexism suggests that it is a stronger predictor for women as compared to men. Benevolent sexist women were more likely to show decreased support for abortion, birth control access, and support for the #MeToo Movement. More research needs to be done to understand how gender moderates the relationship between benevolent sexism and policy attitudes as our findings suggest that women and men may have different motivations for adopting benevolent sexist attitudes. One possibility of many is that benevolent sexist women may oppose abortion and birth control because they conflict with heteronormative and gendered notions of motherhood. In contrast, benevolent sexist men may not oppose abortion and birth control, *per se*, especially since these could offer men ways to "protect" women in their lives (e.g., a father encouraging his teenage daughter to obtain an abortion). Because there is some evidence of racial differences in benevolent sexism (Davis et al., 2022), scholars should be challenged to acquire larger samples of racial/ethnic groups to more adequately model intersectional effects.

Finally, we found that benevolent sexism was related to increased support for the #MeToo Movement. Although this was not an expected finding, it squares with the protective nature of benevolent sexism and is consistent with research that has found a positive relationship between benevolent sexism and support for gender quotas and even compliance with public health measures (Chen and Farhart, 2020; Beauregard and Sheppard, 2021). This connection raises important questions for how men view this movement and the strategies that political leaders and activists should take in pushing for more progressive policies. Understanding how various forms of sexism relate to policy attitudes can be helpful for social movement organizations (SMOs) hoping to appeal to and mobilize men on their behalf. For example, SMOs targeted men in Ireland's Repeal the 8th referendum, the amendment in their constitution that prohibited abortion for any reason. This framing in messaging on social media included themes like "She lives on your street" or "Grandfathers for Yes" (Hunt and Friesen, 2021). Nearly all of the messages in the anti-abortion and pro-choice tweets aimed at men took on a benevolent sexism theme. The 8th was repealed, and men did turn out on behalf of a "women's" issue but appealing to protective tropes can undermine broader gender equality goals. In the example of appealing to men in anti-sex trafficking movements, messages like "real men don't buy girls" could do more harm than good (Steele and Shores, 2015). By treating women as weak humans who need protection from men, benevolent sexist framing undermines the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality.

With the U.S. Supreme Court poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and severely restrict abortion rights for millions of women, this research also has implications for how we understand both abortion attitudes and attitudes about the potential rollback of abortion rights. Although our findings are only correlational in nature, our results suggest that both antipathy toward women and opposition to measures to address gender inequality predict negative support for abortion. This is a useful insight into the

motivations that drive anti-abortion attitudes in light of the fact that most pro-life activist groups emphasize the desire to protect the sanctity of fetal life. Our research indicates that all different forms of sexist intuitions, hostile, benevolent, and modern, drive anti-choice attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Overall, our results reveal a complicated relationship between different conceptualizations of sexism and gendered attitudes, underscoring the need to consider how different forms of sexism shape broader social and political views, from both a normative perspective for societal change and a measurement approach for research precision. Because of the observational nature of our data, there are many limitations to our findings. We can only speculate about the exact mechanisms that connect sexism to gendered policy attitudes. Furthermore, both of our samples were predominantly white. This limits the generalizability of our findings to the broader population, and future research should explore the interaction between gender and race as it relates to sexism and political attitudes. For example, gender, race, and religiosity interact to shape abortion support, demonstrating the importance of these intersectional dynamics (Holman et al., 2020). More work needs to be done to fully understand the complexities of gender, race, and sexism in shaping political attitudes.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Temple University Institutional Review Board. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CG and KA collaborated in designing and conducting this study. CG has taken the lead role in developing the article and conducting the statistical analysis. KA and AF contributed to the theoretical framework and to the discussion. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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Gender bias in political candidate evaluation among voters: The role of party support and political gender attitudes

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To explain women's underrepresentation in politics, supply-side factors receive much empirical support, emphasizing the low numbers of women on the ballot. Whether demand from voters also contributes to the problem is less clear, however, as both observational and experimental research shows that average voters are not less likely to vote for women candidates. We argue that voters actually do play a role, although not all voters to an equal extent. More precisely, we expect the gender bias in the electorate to be conditional upon partisanship and propose two mechanisms through which this materializes: political gender attitudes and/or gender stereotypes. Although the conditionality of voters' gender bias based upon partisanship is convincingly shown to exist in the US, much less is known about it in the European context, while its multi-party political systems lend themselves well for a more detailed differentiation between party families. We expect that right, and especially populist radical right, voters are biased in favor of men politicians, while left, and especially green left, voters are biased in favor of women politicians. We test our hypotheses with a large-scale vignette experiment ($N = 13,489$) in the Netherlands, and show that there is indeed a (slight) preference for women representatives among Green party voters, and a clear preference for men candidates among voters of populist radical right parties. Moderate left-wing or right-wing voters, however, show no gender bias. Thus, although right-wing populist parties have electoral incentives to be hesitant about promoting women politicians, most other parties face no electoral risk in putting forth women politicians.

KEYWORDS

gender bias, candidate evaluations, political parties, gender attitudes, gender stereotypes

Introduction

Do voters contribute to the underrepresentation of women in political office? In explaining the low numbers of women in politics, existing work points to various factors: the gender gap in political ambition (Fox and Lawless, 2010), gendered party recruitment (Verge and Claveria, 2018), and gender-differentiated media coverage

(Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020). Voters, by contrast, are usually not seen as a main source of the gender imbalance in politics. Observational studies find a lack of impact of candidate gender on vote choice (e.g., Dolan, 2014; Hayes and Lawless, 2016; Bridgewater and Nagel, 2020), while experimental research shows that respondents are *not* more negative about women candidates and that they are also *not* less likely to vote for them (Schwarz and Coppock, 2022).

We argue that voters actually do play a role in women's underrepresentation, although *not all voters to an equal extent*. More specifically, we expect that voters of some specific parties prefer a man or a woman as representative. Put differently, the gender bias in the electorate is conditional upon partisanship. The conditionality of voters' gender bias based on partisanship is mainly been studied in the US, were it is shown that Republicans favor men politicians while Democrats prefer women candidates (e.g., Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009; Schwarz and Coppock, 2022). However, very little is known about this in the European context, while the multi-party political system in most European countries lend themselves well for a more fine-grained examination of the role of partisanship. The main contribution of this paper is that we study this phenomenon in the multiparty context of the Netherlands, more finely distinguishing between different parties. Specifically, we expect that right and especially populist radical right voters are biased in favor of men politicians, while left and especially green left voters are biased in favor of women politicians.

We test our hypotheses with a vignette experiment (N = 13,489), which was integrated into two waves of the Dutch *EenVandaag* opinion panel. Prior to the experiment, we asked participants to answer questions measuring their attitudes toward women in politics. Three weeks later, we randomly assigned participants to the man or woman politician version of a newspaper-like introduction of a new member of Parliament, after which we gauged the evaluation of the politician. Because of the large sample size, we are able to distinguish the effect of politician gender among the electorates of five party families and twelve distinct parties.

The results provide cause for both concern and optimism when it comes to the prospect of gender parity in parliament. On the one hand, electorates of populist right parties are indeed biased against women representatives, making it very unappealing for these parties to increase their share of women in parliament. This is particularly detrimental, because these parties are major drivers of female underrepresentation in parliaments where they are present. On the other hand, most other parties, face either a bonus or no electoral repercussions from their voters from nominating women. Thus, particularly among the mainstream right, there is ample electoral opportunity for the improvement of equal gender representation.

Theoretical framework

Over 100 years after obtaining voting rights in most European and North American countries, women are still underrepresented in politics. In Europe, women make up just over 30% of country lower house members, in the US and Canada it is, respectively, 27.0 and 30.5%[1]. Party leaders in the post-war period have been overwhelmingly men (O'Brien, 2015), and the same holds for prime-ministers and cabinet members (O'Brien et al., 2015).

Explanations for women's underrepresentation can be divided into *supply-side* and *demand-side* focused (Karpowitz et al., 2017); see also Norris, 1996; Mügge and Runderkamp, 2019. On the supply-side are explanations for the low numbers of women candidates on the ballot. For instance, gendered socialization leads to different levels of political ambition among men and women (Fox and Lawless, 2011, 2014; Schneider et al., 2016), men and women respond differently to party recruitment (Preece et al., 2016), women are recruited less often (Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Lawless and Fox, 2010), and parties' electorates and candidate selection rules affect the gender balance of the candidate pool (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger, 2015).

Whether *demand from voters* also contributes to the problem is less clear. In fact, two types of evidence testify *against* a gender bias in the electorate. One is from observational data: The electoral outcomes of races in which women compete show that women win at equal rates as men (e.g., Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Similarly, election studies on large scale surveys indicate that the gender of a political candidate either hardly matters or has too little sway to override the overwhelming influence of partisanship (Dolan, 2014; Hayes and Lawless, 2016; Bridgewater and Nagel, 2020). However, this lack of gender bias might result from unobserved heterogeneity between men and women candidates, for instance, a higher quality of and/or effort paid by women than (Anzia and Berry, 2011; Lazarus and Steigerwalt, 2018; Bauer, 2020). Nevertheless, a second type of evidence, based on experimental studies, also finds no gender bias in voters' reactions to women politicians. In such studies, respondents see short profiles of candidates, in which the gender of the candidate is randomly assigned to man or woman, and they are asked for an evaluation or their vote intention. A recent meta-analysis of these type of experiments shows that, on average, respondents are *not* more negative about women candidates and that they are also *not* less likely to vote for them (Schwarz and Coppock, 2022).

Even though voters on average might not show a gender bias toward men or women political candidates, we argue that specific groups of voters might. Thus, we expect that

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voters do play a role in women's underrepresentation, although *not all voters to an equal extent*. We contend that voters of particular parties do prefer a man or a woman as their representative, or, put differently, that gender bias in the electorate is conditional upon the party preference of the voter. Our expectations, which we outline further below, are that left-party and particularly Green-party voters prefer women, while right-party and particularly populist right voters prefer men. As a result, right-wing and populist right parties actually face an electoral disincentive to increase the share of women among their candidates. In most legislatures, right-wing and particularly populist right parties are already the parties with the strongest male overrepresentation (e.g., Caul, 1999; O'Brien, 2018, p. 105; Sundström and Stockemer, 2021), which means that precisely those parties that are in the best position to improve women's representation, have no electoral incentive to do so.

This party-voter conditionality is not an entirely new argument: previous scholarship has shown a relation between voters' gender bias and partisanship in the context of the US. These studies show that Republican voters favor men candidates while Democratic voters prefer a women in office (e.g., Sanbonmatsu, 2002; King and Matland, 2003; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009; Schwarz and Coppock, 2022). However, very little is known about how this plays out in the European context with multiple parties competing rather than two. To the best of our knowledge, three prior studies provide some insight into this phenomenon in European multi-party systems, two of which make no further distinction among parties than a left/right dichotomy. Wilcox (1991), analyzing Eurobarometer data, showed that right-wing voters have less confidence in women legislators than in men legislators in five out of the eight countries studied. More recently, Dahl and Nyrup (2021) conducted a candidate choice experiment showing that left-wing voters prefer women candidates, while right-wing voters show no gender bias in Denmark. By contrast, Saha and Weeks (2020) did allow more fine-grained differences among parties, and show very little impact of partisanship on gender bias in preferences of candidates in the UK.

In all, little is known about the moderating role of voter party on gender differentiated favourability of politicians in Europe. In the remainder of this theory section, we argue *why* we expect that voters of some parties prefer men while those of other parties prefer women representatives. We propose two paths through which this party differentiated gender preference comes about: (1) voters of different parties have divergent attitudes about gender in politics (arrow *a * b* in Figure 1); and (2) because of ideologically laden gender stereotypes, men or women candidates may be directly more appealing to some party supporters (arrow *c'* in Figure 1). Figure 1 graphically displays the overall conditionality of voters' gender bias on party preference on the left side, while it outlines the two mechanisms on the right side. Before we further elaborate on

these two mechanisms, we first posit the overall expectation in a hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (moderating effect of party preferences; arrow c in Figure 1):

Hypothesis 1.1: Right-wing -and particularly populist radical right- voters are biased in favor of men politicians.

Hypothesis 1.2: Left-wing -and particularly green left- voters are biased in favor of women politicians.

Path 1: Mediated moderation of voter party on gender bias through political gender attitudes

As the first mechanism, we posit that party ideology is associated with attitudes about gender in politics, which we refer to as *political gender attitudes*, and that these in turn lead to gender bias in candidate preferences. There is a long-established link on the party level between broader political ideology and ideas about gender. Economically left-wing political parties tend to promote egalitarian values (Saha and Weeks, 2020) and represent previously excluded groups, such as women (Matland and Studlar, 1996; Htun, 2005). Additionally, progressive, left-wing parties focus on post-materialist issues and favor expanding personal freedoms (Dalton, 1987; Bakker et al., 2015; see Röth and Schwander, 2021), espousing positive views on minority rights and traditional women's issues, such as equal pay, the right to abortion, and preventing gender-based violence. Historically, left-wing parties are linked to the women's movement (e.g., Jenson, 1985; Beckwith, 2000; Viterna and Fallon, 2008) and have strong women's organizations within the party that promote women's issues and representation (Franceschet and Thomas, 2015). Among left wing parties, Green parties have been particularly supportive of women in politics (Keith and Verge, 2018; O'Brien, 2018; Kantola and Lombardo, 2019; see also Caul, 2001). Greens were often the frontrunners in addressing feminist policy demands, such as childcare policies (Doherty, 2001), and are the strongest proponents of equal descriptive representation within their own organizations (i.e., by gender-related interventions in the recruitment process, see Reynolds, 1999).

Parties on the right, by contrast, usually stand for more traditional gender roles in society and are associated with social conservatism and traditional values (Wolbrecht, 2010; Saha and Weeks, 2020). In the UK, for instance, Conservative politicians have less positive attitudes about affirmative action for women and gender equality attitudes (such as the role of men and women within families) than politicians from the Labor party (Lovenduski and Norris, 2003). As a consequence of all this, liberal and left-wing political parties tend to do better in descriptive representation of women than conservative, right-wing parties (e.g., Caul, 1999; O'Brien, 2018, p. 105; Sundström

FIGURE 1
Causal model with total moderating effect on the left and mediated moderation on the right.
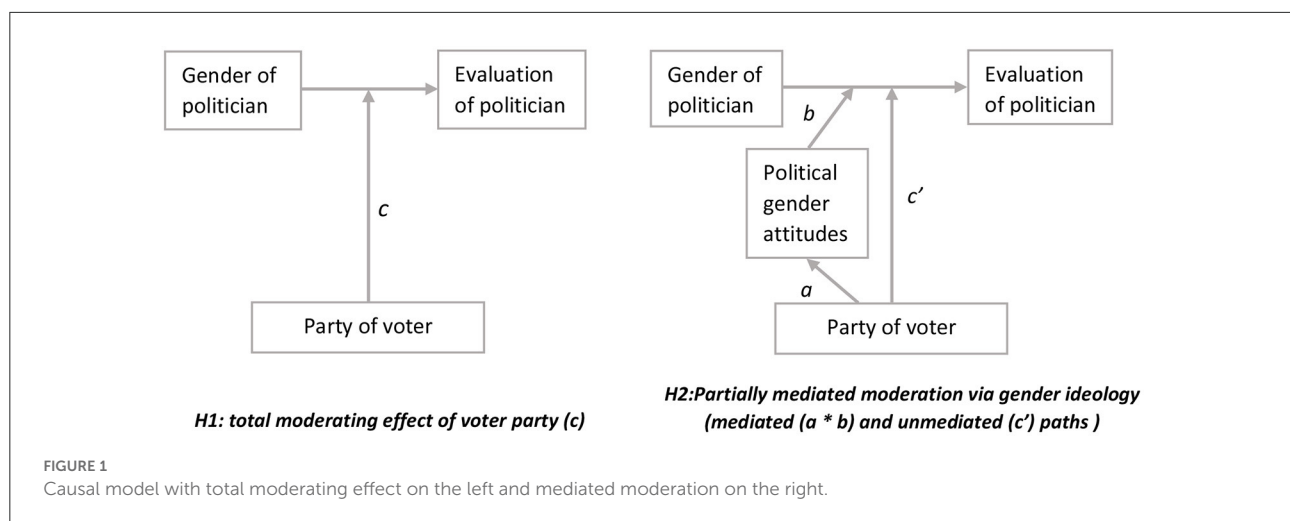
and Stockemer, 2021). On the right side of the political spectrum, populist radical right parties stand out, having the reputation of 'männerparteien' (Mudde, 2004; Spierings et al., 2015). O'Brien (2018), for instance, shows that nationalist far-right parties perform poorly compared to other right-wing parties, such as the Christian democrats and conservatives, in bringing women into parliament. Moreover, right-wing populist parties often employ an anti-feminist rhetoric and plead for traditional family roles, ending the discrimination of full-time mothers, and anti-abortion policies, while expressing ethnicized sexist claims (i.e., claims that immigrant, oftentimes Muslim, men are a physical/sexual threat to native women) (e.g., Akkerman, 2015; Berg, 2019), and femonationalist claims (i.e., presenting gender equality as core national value that is threatened by Muslim immigrants) (e.g., De Lange and Mügge, 2015; Fangen and Skjelsbæk, 2020).

While the preceding mainly concerns *party* ideology, these attitudes are also echoed in the parties' voter bases. Conservative voters in the US, for instance, score higher on modern sexism than liberal voters (Cassese et al., 2015), and research focusing on the 2016 US presidential elections shows that Republican voters score higher on the general sexist attitudes scale than Democratic voters (e.g., Blair, 2017; Bock et al., 2017; Valentino et al., 2018; Rothwell et al., 2019). Likewise, in various European countries, voting for left-wing parties is correlated to pro-feminist attitudes (e.g., Banaszak and Plutzer, 1993), while (far) right-wing party support is linked to stronger sexist attitudes (e.g., Lodders and Weldon, 2019). In addition, in both the US and Europe, there is a positive relationship between pro-environmentalist attitudes and feminist ideology (Somma and Tolleson-Rinehart, 1997).

Not only are broad ideas about gender in society linked to political ideology, left-wing and right-wing voters also differ in their more specific attitudes concerning women in politics,

i.e., what we have called *political gender attitudes* (arrow *a* in Figure 1). In the US, for instance, Democratic voters have a stronger preference for gender parity in government than Republican voters (Dolan and Sanbonmatsu, 2009; Dolan and Lynch, 2015). In the European context, we similarly see that left-wing voters show more support for a higher number of women in political decision-making positions (Fernández and Valiente, 2021), while right-wing voters more often agree with the statement that men are better political leaders (Allen and Cutts, 2018).

Political gender attitudes, in turn, can be expected to result in a gender bias in candidate evaluations and voting behavior. Sanbonmatsu (2002), for instance, shows that voters have a "baseline gender preference," i.e., a preference for a man or woman representative, all else equal, and that this baseline gender preference directly affects voting decisions. Paolino (1995) shows that voters who think it is important to have better descriptive representation of women in politics, are more likely to vote for a women candidate. Mo (2015), additionally, shows that citizens with a stronger bias in favor of men over women in political leadership positions, both measured explicitly and implicitly, are also more strongly inclined to vote for a men candidate over an equally qualified women candidate. Thus, we can expect that once voters have political gender preferences based on their ideology/partisanship (arrow *a* in Figure 1), they will also act accordingly and prefer/vote for men or women candidates based on their political gender attitudes (arrow *b* in Figure 1).

All in all, we expect right-wing (and particularly populist radical right) party supporters to have more conservative ideas about gender in politics, and we expect that those ideas lead to a preference for men politicians. Conversely, left-wing (particularly green) party supporters are expected to have favorable attitudes about women in politics, and those ideas are

expected to lead to a preference for women politicians. In other words, we expect that the party-moderated biases in favor of men or women candidates of hypothesis 1, are party *mediated via* political gender attitudes (displayed in arrows *a * b* in Figure 1). However, we expect that the political gender attitudes mediate the moderation partly but not completely, for reasons we go into next.

Path 2: Unmediated moderation effect

Political gender attitudes, however, are not the only way in which party support is linked to a gender bias in candidate preferences. Even among voters with similar ideas about women in politics, men politicians might be more appealing to right-wing voters and women politicians to left-wing voter because of gender stereotypes. Stereotypes imply that identical characteristics are assigned to all members of a group, irrespective of the differences in characteristics within the group (e.g., Aronson, 2004). Voters have repeatedly been found to have gender stereotypes (e.g., Williams and Best, 1990; Brooks, 2013; Dolan, 2014), among which we can distinguish belief-, traits-, and issue gender stereotypes (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Because of these stereotypes, left-wing and right-wing voters can have distinct candidate gender preferences, even without their political gender attitudes playing any part.

First, women are often assumed to be more left-leaning or liberal than their men colleagues. This belief-stereotype (or ideology-stereotype) received quite some empirical support. Koch (2000), for instance, compares the by voters' perceived ideology of politicians and their actual roll-call voting behavior and shows that women politicians are assumed to be more liberal than they actually are. Additionally, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) show that women politicians are believed to be more liberal and more democratic than their men colleagues (see also Alexander and Andersen, 1993; Koch, 2000; King and Matland, 2003). If voters assume that women politicians are more left-leaning than their men opponents, then ideologically committed left-wing voters will have a stronger preference for women politicians and devoted right-wing voters a stronger preference for men politicians.

Second, and related to these belief-stereotypes, voters evaluate women and men differently in terms of their issue competencies. Women are thought to be particularly strong on compassionate issues like social welfare, health care, and the environment, while men are thought to be strong on issues like law and order, immigration, the military, terrorism, and fiscal policy (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Lawless, 2004; Banwart, 2010; Holman et al., 2016). The compassionate issues that are linked to the feminine stereotype overlap strongly with the typical issues left-wing parties care about, while the so-called masculine

issues are usually key policy issues for right-wing parties (e.g., Petrocik, 1996; Hayes, 2005; Green-Pedersen, 2007). Based on the stereotypical beliefs of issue importance and policy standpoints, thus, left-wing voters should be more likely to be attracted to women candidates and right-wing voters to men candidates.

Third, women and men are often believed to possess different character traits. Men are generally associated with agentic characteristics, such as aggressive, ambitious, independent, self-confident and active, while women are associated with more communal qualities such as empathetic, caring, emotional, and understanding (Kite et al., 2008; Banwart, 2010; Brooks, 2013; Bos et al., 2018). These trait stereotypes lead to distinct evaluations of candidates based on political ideology. Research shows that left-wing parties are strongly associated with communal traits while right-wing parties are more strongly linked to agentic traits (Hayes, 2005; see also e.g., Rule and Ambady, 2010; Winter, 2010). Thus, also based on the link between gender and partisan trait stereotypes, left-wing voters should be more inclined to prefer women candidates and right-wing voters men candidates.

In sum, the beliefs, traits and issues strengths associated with women politicians should be appealing to the left part of the electorate, and objectionable to the right[2]. Further, this appeal or repulsion should be especially apparent for voters of the most "extreme" parties on the left/right political spectrum: the populist radical right and the green left. Together, this implies that gender stereotypes should have different consequences for (populist) right-wing voters than they do for (green) left-wing voters. That is, if a women belief, trait or issue stereotype is applied in the mind of a right-wing voter, it functions as a push-factor, while for a left-wing voter it is a pull factor. Importantly, it can function as a push or pull factor regardless the ideas the voter has about the role of women in politics. In other words, this means that voter partisanship moderates the effect of candidate gender, also *unmediated* by political gender attitudes. In all, therefore, we expect that right-wing voters are biased in favor of men politicians and left-wing voters in favor of women (H1), and we expect this bias to be *partially* (path 1) but *not fully* (path 2) mediated by their explicit attitudes about gender in politics (H2): *Hypothesis 2 (Partially mediated moderation; arrows a * b and c' in Figure 1):*

Hypothesis 2.1: Right-wing -and particularly populist radical right-voters' bias in favor of men politicians is partly mediated by political gender attitudes.

Hypothesis 2.2: Left-wing -and particularly green left-voters' bias in favor of women politicians is partly mediated by political gender attitudes.

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2   This particularly holds if we assume voters prefer their representative to be less centrist than themselves, see Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989).

Data & methods

Data and vignette experiment

The study was conducted in the Netherlands, a parliamentary democracy with an extremely proportional electoral system due to the low electoral threshold and single electoral district. Moreover, in this context, parties together with party leaders dominate electoral choice, while the rest of the parliamentary list plays only a small role. Thus, it is a context where one would not expect large effects of personal attributes of legislative candidates such as their gender. While it remains a single case-study, any gender bias we find could arguably be expected to be larger in more personal systems like the US or the UK.

To examine the preferences of various electorates with regards to the gender of politicians, and the extent to which those preferences are mediated by political gender attitudes, we developed a survey experiment. We fielded our experiment in the Dutch public opinion panel called *EenVandaag*, organized by a daily news show of the same name. This is an online self-application panel, of which around 25,000 unique respondents participate in their weekly online surveys. The data we use are collected in two waves, of which wave 1 (July 2019) took place 3 weeks before wave 2. In wave 1, we asked respondents about their political gender attitudes. In Wave 2, we included the survey experiment. The experiment consisted of a vignette that introduced respondents to a replacement representative. In the vignette, we randomized the gender of the politician by describing the politician using gendered pronouns (she/her/hers and he/his/him). To provide participants with contextual information, we explain that a Member of Parliament has to resign, and that the replacement representative is already experienced in local politics. This is a realistic scenario, as the Dutch electoral system uses a party-list, that indicates who is next in line to take up a seat for the party in Parliament. This replacement scenario allows us to inspect how voters evaluate the candidates a party puts on the list, but at the level of a single MP rather than an entire list, allowing us to isolate the effect of their gender.

The vignette describes the political party the politician belongs to, which we randomize over GreenLeft (GL), Christian Democrats (CDA), and the Populist Radical Right (PVV). These parties are, respectively, a left-wing opposition party, a confessional coalition party, and a right-wing opposition party. Additionally, we provide participants with some basic trait evaluations of the prospective politician, which we randomize over nine different traits, on which the fictitious politicians could either be evaluated positive or negative: competence, decisiveness, benevolence, listening to people, steadfastness, transparency, integrity, charisma, empathy. We developed two different versions of the vignette to which participants were randomly assigned: one in which the politician was described

on all nine traits ($N = 10,325$) and one in which the candidate was only described in terms of one trait ($N = 5,166$). Appendix A shows an example of a full and small vignette. In the paper, we present results from a pooled analysis of both vignette types. The findings are substantively similar in separate analyses (reported in Appendix E), though they are mostly non-significant for the shorter version of the experiment. This is likely due to the smaller N per party electorate, but we cannot exclude the possibility that the type of vignette matters, for instance due to more prejudice suppression in this lower information context (see Horiuchi et al., 2021). After reading the vignette, respondents were asked to evaluate the proposed replacement representative.

In total, after accounting for missing values, 13,489 members of the *EenVandaag* panel participated in the experiment, 6,618 in the woman politician condition and 6,871 in the man politician condition. Of the participants, 27% identified as women, 73% as men and the mean age is 65 (SD = 11). Although the elderly, men and higher educated are overrepresented in the panel, it offers a broad cross-section of the Dutch population, and specifically political party electorates (see Appendix B), which suits the demands of our experiment. Appendix F replicates the main results, weighing for respondent gender.

Variables and method

The dependent variable is a rating of the fictitious politician that respondents were introduced to in the vignette. The rating variable asks how respondents evaluate the candidate overall on a scale from 0 (very negative) to 10 (very positive). Out dependent variable is thus not vote choice *per se*, something we come back to in the conclusion.

To measure political gender attitudes, we developed a scale including five items about the attitudes about gender in politics in the Netherlands (which were measured in Wave 1). We departed from the Classical and Modern Sexism scales (Swim et al., 1995; Ekehammar et al., 2000; Dierckx et al., 2017), but adapted the items to refer specifically to gender in politics, rather than society in general. Of the five items, two tapped into classical sexism (for example "men are more capable of making political decisions than women"), and three into modern sexism (for example, the reverse of "women get less chances in politics in the Netherlands than men"). Modern sexism has three components: denial of continuing discrimination, antagonism toward demands of women and resentment about special favors (Swim et al., 1995). We gave priority to the component denial of continuing discrimination with two items, and reserved only one item for a combination of antagonism toward demands and resentments about special favors. We did this so that people who oppose government action broadly speaking, would not score as gender conservative for opposing affirmative action. The

exact wording of the items can be found in Appendix C. The reliability of the scale of the five items was good (Cronbach's alpha 0.82).

To establish respondents' political party preferences, we use a variable that asks about the party they voted for in the most recent national parliamentary election (2017). Below, we show the results in two ways: parties grouped into party families and all parties separately. The Green party family includes *Groenlinks* (Green Left, GL) and the *Partij voor de Dieren* (Animal Party, PvdD), the Labor/Socialists include the *Socialistische Partij* (Socialist Party, SP) and the *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labor party, PvdA), the Liberals include the *Democraten 66* (Democrats, D66) and the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, VVD), the Christian party family includes the *ChristenUnie* (Christen Union, CU) and the *Staatskundig Gereformeerde Partij* (Reformed Political Party, SGP), the populist radical right party family includes the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Freedom Party, PVV) and the *Forum voor Democratie* (Forum for Democracy, FVD). *50Plus* (Senior Party) voters are not included in the party family analyses because they fall outside the main party families, and *Denk* (Think, ethnic minority party) voters are excluded for their low number (seven respondents).

To model whether voters are biased against or in favor of women politicians, we interact dummies for the respondent's party family with a dummy variable for the gender of the politician, and calculate the effect of politician gender on the evaluation of the politician per party family. Thus, we understand the *effect* of the politician's gender on politicians' evaluation as gender bias, and we condition this effect on voter partisanship. To test hypothesis 1.1, we focus on the voters of the liberal (VVD and D66), Christian (CDA, CU, and SGP) and particularly radical right (PVV and FvD) party families. To test hypothesis 1.2, we focus on the voters of the Labor/Socialists (PvdA and SP) and particularly Green (GL and PvdD) party family. In all, hypothesis 1 establishes whether voters of certain party families are biased for or against women politicians through statistical moderation; hypothesis 2 further inspects to what extent this interaction effect is mediated by political gender attitudes (see Figure 1). In other words, this hypothesis assesses whether voters of certain party families hold progressive/conservative political gender attitudes, and whether these attitudes then moderate the gender bias, i.e., the effect of politician gender on evaluation of the politician. To examine this, we include the interaction between political gender attitudes and the gender of the politician in addition to

FIGURE 2
Total effect of voter party on gender bias. Full models in Appendix D. The left panel is based on model (1) in Appendix Table D1, the right panel is based on model (1) in Appendix Table D2.

FIGURE 3
Effect of voter party on political gender attitudes. Full models in Appendix D. The left panel is based on model (1) in Appendix Table D3, the right panel is based on model (2) in Appendix Table D3.

the interaction between the party family and the gender of the politician, and compare the results to those of the model without this former interaction (see Hayes, 2017). The interaction between politician gender and party family in the model *without* political gender attitudes gives the total moderation of party family, while the interaction between politician gender and party family in the model *with* political gender attitudes indicates how much of the moderation is not mediated by political gender attitudes. Thus, by comparing the effect of politician gender per party family in the model with and without the political gender attitudes interaction, we can establish to what extent the party family differences in gender bias run through attitudes about women in politics[3]. Finally, while we test our hypotheses distinguishing between the electorates of the five party families, we subsequently we repeat the analyses distinguishing between 12 parties, to gain more fine-grained insight.

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3   This is similar to a regular strategy used to study mediation, where a model with and without the mediator are compared. In this case, as we study mediated moderation rather than mediation, rather than a simple mediator, the mediator is added in interaction with gender of the politician (see Hayes, 2017).

In our analyses, we control for level of education (low, medium, high), age, gender, the traits respondents encountered in the vignette experiment. In addition, as respondents randomly saw a vignette about one of three parties, we control for the party of the politician in the vignette and whether the party of the fictitious politician is a match to the respondent's own party preference in either a perfect match, a medium match (in the case of vignette party if Green Left party also left-wing opposition party, in case of CDA also coalition party, in case of PVV also right-wing opposition party), or no match. For our analysis, we ran a series of OLS regressions with various interaction effects.

Results

Are the voters of some parties biased in favor or against women legislators? Our first hypothesis states that on the one hand, left wing and particularly Green voters would be biased in favor of women politicians, while on the other hand right-wing and especially populist right voters would favor men. We model this by predicting the favourability toward a candidate by the gender of the candidate in interaction with the party
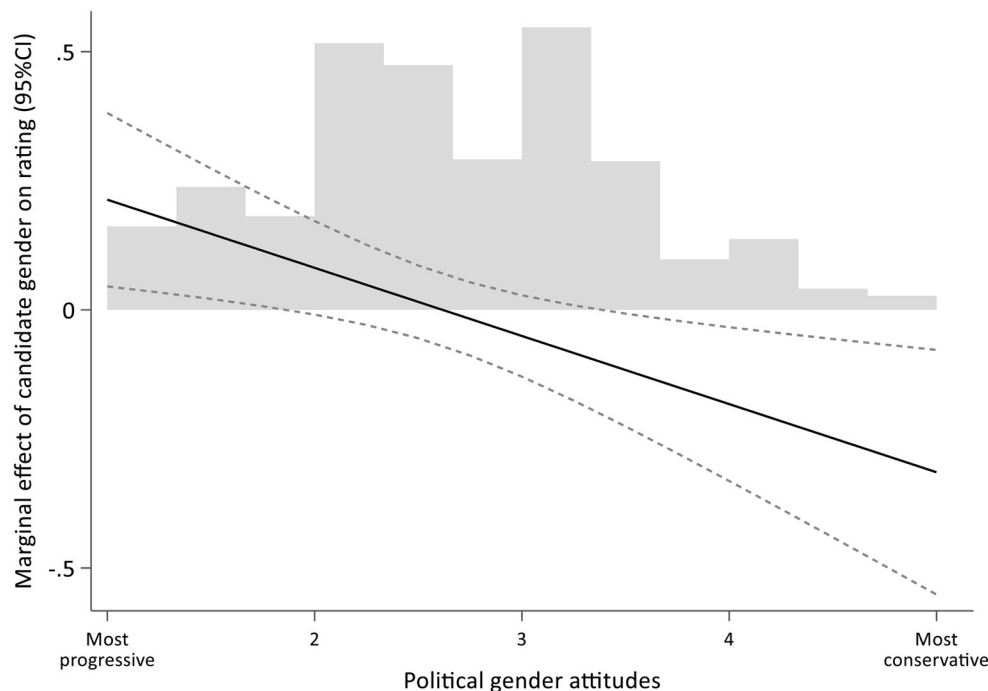
FIGURE 4
Effect of political gender attitudes on gender bias. Full models in Appendix D. This figure is based on Appendix Table D1 model (2).

family participants voted for, while controlling for demographic variables and other vignette properties. The left panel of Figure 2 displays the effect of legislator gender on their overall rating per party family (see Appendix D for full regression table). It shows that our expectations are partially supported. On the left flank, Green party voters are indeed more positive about a woman legislator, giving women a 0.15 higher rating on the ten-point scale, but this is only marginally significant ($p = 0.113$). Other left party voters taken together display no preference for either men or women, contrary to our expectation. Neither do voters of the liberal or Christian party families. Populist party voters, however, do espouse a preference for a men legislators, rating women 0.18 points lower on a ten-point scale ($p = 0.016$). All in all, both sides of hypothesis 1 are only partially supported.

The right panel of Figure 2 further splits out the results by party participants voted for, rather than party family. The parties are ordered by general left-right position (Jolly et al., 2022), which again shows that there is little support for the idea that gender bias is driven by left-right party attachment of the voter *per se*. Among the populist right parties we now see that PVV supporters have a clear and significant preference for a man legislator, while FvD supporters have a slightly smaller and non-significant preference for men. What jumps out most, however, is the strong preference for men representatives among voters of the small Christian party the SGP, who evaluate women almost an entire point lower than men ($p = 0.035$). This is perhaps not

surprising, as this party only allows women as its representatives since 2013, and only did so after pressure from the Supreme Court. On the other side of the political spectrum, voters of the two Green parties, GL and PvdD, both prefer women legislators by about 0.15 (on the ten-point evaluation scale), but neither effect is statistically significant. Splitting out the liberal parties D66 and VVD shows that voters of the culturally more progressive D66 prefer women legislators by 0.24 ($p = 0.045$). Thus, summarizing the results thus far, there is evidence that populist right voters prefer men, weak evidence that Green party voters prefer women, and otherwise no clear left-right difference in gender bias.

We now turn to the mechanisms for why some party voters prefer a man or a woman as representative. We begin by inspecting the first step in the mediated path we proposed, that is, by checking whether the voter bases of the various parties differ in their attitudes toward women in politics (arrow *a* in Figure 1). Figure 3 shows that they clearly do. On the left side of the figure, the party families line up in such a way that Greens have the most progressive gender attitudes, and populist right voters the most conservative. Voters of these two party families differ about one whole point on this four-point scale ($p = 0.000$). This is a substantial difference: Green voters are predicted to be at the 28th percentile in political gender attitudes, while populist right voters are considerably more conservative at the 75th percentile. Additionally, voters of traditional left parties

FIGURE 5
Comparison of total and direct effect of voter party on gender bias. Full models in Appendix D. The left panel is based on models (1) and (3) in Appendix Table D1, the right panel is based on models (1) and (3) in Appendix Table D2.
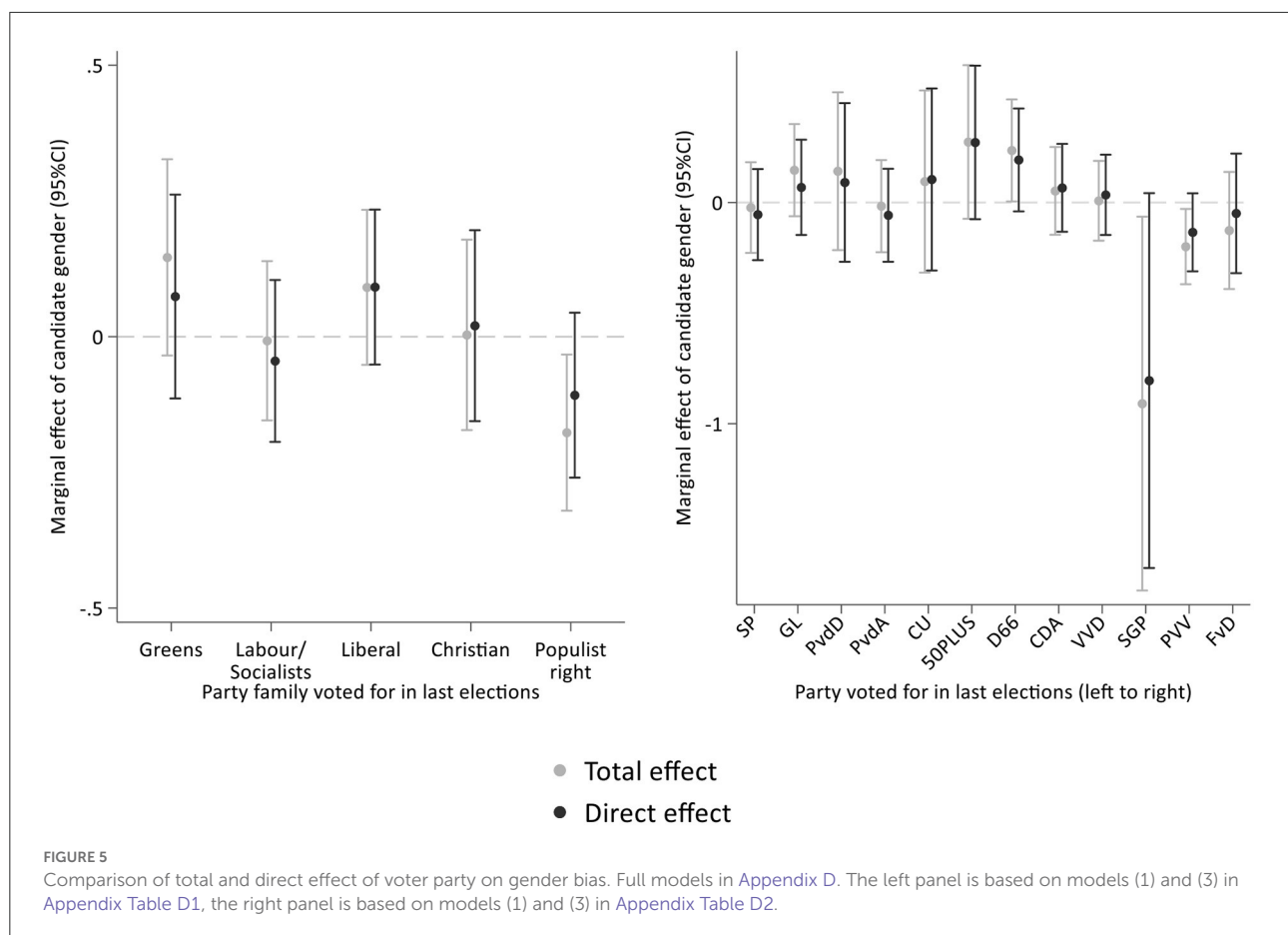
(Labor/Socialists) have more progressive ideas about women in politics than right wing parties of the Liberal and Christian party families, with a difference of, respectively, 0.27 and 0.40 on the four-point scale. Splitting this out by party on the right side of the figure, we again see striking left-right pattern, with voters of left wing parties tending to be more progressive and right voters more conservative in their views on women in politics. Voters of the liberal party D66 form an exception, but that is not surprising given the progressive reputation and stance of this party on the cultural dimension. Also unsurprisingly, voters of the two small Christian parties CU and SGP stand out for their more conservative gender attitudes than suggested by their left-right position. The final exception to the left-right rule is the SP, whose voters have about the same ideas about women in politics as those of the Labor party (PvdA), while the party is more to the left.

Next, do these attitudes about women in politics translate into bias toward a man or woman candidate? We examine the ensuing step in the mediating mechanism (arrow *b* in Figure 1) by adding the interaction between political gender attitudes and legislator gender to the model explaining rating, alongside the interaction between party family voted for and legislator

gender. The added interaction is negative and significant ($p = 0.006$), indicating that political gender attitudes indeed affect bias toward a man or woman representative (see Appendix D for full results). Figure 4 illustrates this, showing that voters with progressive political gender attitudes rate women significantly more highly than men, while for voters with conservative political gender attitudes the opposite holds.

Thus, party voter bases differ in their attitudes toward women in politics, and these attitudes predict whether they are biased in favor of men or women representatives, but can we conclude political gender attitudes mediate the effect of party support on gender bias? That is, to what extent do Green voters favor women legislators and populist right voters men legislators *because* of their ideas about the role of gender in politics? To study this, we compare the conditional effect of legislator gender by party voted for when modeled with, and without the interaction between legislator gender and political gender attitudes. If in that model the interaction effect between legislator gender and party is smaller, that informs us that this effect is mediated by the moderation between legislator gender and political gender attitudes. In other words, we compare the *total* effect of gender per party (arrow *c* in Figure 1) with the

direct effect (arrow *c'* in Figure 1). Figure 5 compares the total effect (in gray) and direct effect (in black) for the party family model on the left again, and the party model on the right. On the left, we see that the direct effect of gender for Green party voters is quite a bit smaller than the total effect: it comprises about 51% of the original effect. Though this is an imprecise estimate, is says that about half the initial bias in favor of women candidates among Green voters can be attributed to their political gender attitudes. Similarly, of the preference for men among populist right voters, about 61% remains when controlling for political gender attitudes, so in our estimate about 39% runs through the mediated path. On the right side of the figure, these findings are seconded for Green parties GL (47% direct) and PvdD (64% direct) and populist right parties FvD (39% direct) and PVV (68% direct) separately. However, it is important to note that all of these estimates are very imprecise, and the mediated percentage may in reality be considerably larger or smaller.

Conclusion

Do voters contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics? Although most recent research shows no gender bias in voter preferences (e.g., Dolan, 2014; Hayes and Lawless, 2016; Bridgewater and Nagel, 2020; Schwarz and Coppock, 2022), we posit that voters do help explain women's political underrepresentation, although *not all voters to an equal extent*. We expected that gender bias in the electorate is dependent on partisanship and that right—and especially populist radical right—voters are biased in favor of men politicians, while left—and especially green left—voters are biased in favor of women politicians. The findings partially support our expectations: Although most moderate left or right party voters show no clear gender preference in political candidates, Green party voters tend to favor a woman candidate, while right-wing populist party voters prefer a man candidate. Additionally, our findings show that the impact of party support on gender bias is partly mediated through political gender attitudes, i.e., the attitudes about women in politics. Around half of the impact of voting for the Green or the right-wing populist party on candidate gender preferences runs through these political gender attitudes.

There are two main take-aways from this study. First, we show that partisanship impacts voters' gender bias. Most studies on the impact of ideology or partisanship on gender bias are located in the two-party system of the US and reveal that Republican voters prefer men candidates while Democratic voters favor women politicians (see for instance Sanbonmatsu, 2002; King and Matland, 2003; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009; Schwarz and Coppock, 2022). Much less in known about the impact of partisanship on gender bias in the European context, in with the multi-party systems lend themselves for a more detailed differentiation between parties (but see Wilcox, 1991; Saha and Weeks, 2020; Dahl and Nyrup, 2021). Our experiment

demonstrates that not all voters show a gender bias, only the voters from the "extreme" parties.

This first conclusion represents both good news and bad news for the representation of women in politics. On the one hand, this shows that female underrepresentation of women cannot be explained with supply-side explanations only, such as gendered party recruitment (Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Preece et al., 2016); Verge and Claveria, 2018) or gender differentiated media coverage of men and women politicians (e.g., Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020), but that there is also voter demand for male overrepresentation. While an anti-women preference was present in only a relatively small part of the electorate, it is located exactly in the electorates of the parties which can do most to bring women into parliament. To illustrate, if the populist right and SGP would increase their parliamentary fractions to half women, female representation in the Dutch Lower House would jump from 61 (41%) to 70 (47%)[4]. Their electorates, however, unfortunately give them no reason to do so. On the other hand, the positive news is that other right-wing parties, or any of the other parties for that matter, face no electoral disincentive to place more women on their lists. This is encouraging considering that the descriptive underrepresentation of women in politics mainly stems from right-wing parties (e.g., Caul, 1999; O'Brien, 2018, p. 105; Sundström and Stockemer, 2021). To illustrate again with the Dutch case, this means that a party like the VVD, with currently 26% women in the Lower House, can aim for gender parity in parliament without fearing backlash from their electorate.

Second, this paper shows that the impact of partisanship on gender bias in candidate preferences is partly, but not fully, mediated by political gender attitudes. With our newly developed scale of political gender attitudes, we not only corroborate previous studies' results that left-wing voters have more progressive and right-wing voters more conservative attitudes about women in politics, but we also show the explanatory power of these attitudes in candidate preferences. The political gender attitudes mediate the effect of partisanship and explain around half of the impact of partisanship on gender bias. A fruitful line of further research could examine the causes of political gender attitudes, and particularly whether voters lead or follow their party elites on these. This is a pressing question in light of the growing electoral support for the populist right, which could potentially lead to a larger share of the electorate adopting conservative ideas about women in politics.

Our study is of course not without limitations. Most importantly, even though theoretically we are interested in gender bias in voting behavior, what we test in our analyses is a gender bias in candidate evaluations. Although previous research shows that candidate evaluations have an impact on voting behavior (e.g., Mughan, 2000; Bittner, 2011; Garzia,

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4   This applies to the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* as of April 2022. Counted as populist right are PVV, FvD, and off-shoot fractions formerly part of FvD.

2013; Lobo and Curtice, 2014; Aaldering, 2018), electoral decisions include many more factors, especially in the Dutch electoral system with party-list proportional representation. Future studies should test whether partisanship in the multi-party context of European democracies also directly affects gender bias in vote choice. Furthermore, although our findings largely corroborate similar research from the US, it relies on a single exposure experiment in the case of the Netherlands and generalizability to other multi-party systems can only be done with great caution. We invite future research to study the impact of partisanship on voters' gender bias experimentally or using observational data from other multi-party electoral contexts and highlight the urgent need for more comparative work on this topic.

All in all, this study shows that voters to some extent indeed contribute to the ongoing underrepresentation of women in politics: some parties have electoral incentives to be hesitant about promoting women politicians. However, this only applies to right-wing populist parties, mainstream right-wing parties face no electoral risk in putting forth women politicians. Generally, this could be explained as positive news for future women candidates, as it shows that the electorates of many parties that currently lack behind in the descriptive representation of women in politics have no electoral motive to do so.

Data availability statement

The raw data and replication files are available upon request.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by AISSR Ethics Advisory Board of the University of Amsterdam. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

DP and LA wrote most of the paper and responsible for formulating the research question and hypotheses. DP, LA, and ES designed the study. ES collected the data and performed the majority of the analyses. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.921252/full#supplementary-material

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The impact of anti-Muslim hostilities on how Muslims connect their religiosity to support for gender equality in Western Europe

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Right-wing populist voices argue that Muslims do not belong in Western Europe because Islam opposes the "core Western value" of women's empowerment. Ironically, such hostilities could cause European Muslims to reject antagonistic natives and their "Western values," potentially creating backlashes in Muslims' support for gender equality. Delving into this possibility, this study diverges from simple conceptualizations of one inherently patriarchal Islam to study the diversity among Muslims in the gendered meanings they attach to their religion in different contexts. Empirically, we use a uniquely pooled dataset covering over 9,000 European Muslims in 16 Western European countries between 2008 and 2019. Multilevel models show that while mosque attendance limits support for public-sphere gender equality, religious identifications only do so among men and individual prayer only among women. Additionally, our results tentatively indicate that in more hostile contexts, prayer's effects become more patriarchal while religious identification's connection to opposition to gender equality weakens. We conclude that Islamic religiosities shape Muslims' support for public-sphere gender equality in far more complex ways than any right-wing populist claim on one essential patriarchal Islam captures.

KEYWORDS

European Muslims, Islam, public opinion, support for gender equality, hostility, exclusion, context-dependency

Introduction

When considering opposition to gender equality in Western Europe, one group that is emphasized in public debates time and again concerns Muslim citizens (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Yilmaz, 2015). Right-wing populists argue in one breath that feminism and "gender theory" are elitist projects that go against the will of the people and simultaneously that Muslims do not belong in Western Europe because Islam opposes the "core Western value" of women's empowerment (Mayer et al., 2014; Spierings and Glas, 2021). While other works considered the first part and studied right-wing populist backlashes in support of women's rights generally (e.g., Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Lombardo et al., 2021),

few have turned their attention to whether such hostilities also engender backlashes among Muslim citizens themselves (cf. Glas, 2022a; Röder and Spierings, 2022). How do Muslims connect their religion to women's emancipation in hostile contexts that tell them Islam necessarily opposes gender equality?

This study unpacks the relation between Islamic religiosity and support for (or hostility toward) gender equality, by disaggregating Islamic religiosity and assessing how its impacts are dependent on the hostility of the context. In doing so, we diverge from both right-wing populists' assumptions that there is one essentialist Islam that is necessarily hostile to women's empowerment (Güngör et al., 2013; Phalet et al., 2013; Kogan and Weißmann, 2020) and the majority of public studies that compare Muslims to other people and attribute any differences to patriarchal Islam (e.g., Diehl et al., 2009; Norris and Inglehart, 2012; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 2018). Instead of one patriarchal Islam, we argue that there is great diversity in the meanings Muslims attach to their religion and therefore disaggregate Islamic religiosity and its effects in different contexts.

Our theoretical starting point is that religious interpretations are not stable and fixed truisms but rather arise from active, meaning-giving processes that are gendered, subject to change, and dependent on contextual circumstances. Qualitative studies have argued that particularly migrants (rather than non-migrants) and women (rather than men) tend to be incredibly resourceful in reinterpreting Islam to meet the demands of their host societies (Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Predelli, 2004; Cesari, 2014; Rinaldo, 2014; Nyhagen, 2019). Similarly, an emerging strand of quantitative work has shown that varying dimensions of Islamic religiosity can shape gender values in different and context-dependent ways (Ginges et al., 2009; Glas et al., 2019; Beller et al., 2021; Glas and Spierings, 2021). Some conditions allow Muslim migrants to "decouple" religiosity from gender equality, i.e., combine the two (Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020; Glas, 2022b; Röder and Spierings, 2022), whereas other circumstances spur reactionary religiosity (Wimmer and Soehl, 2014; Maliepaard and Alba, 2016). This all implies that the ways Islamic religiosities shape support for public-sphere gender equality are (a) multidimensional and (b) conditional.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to argue and test whether the ways that mosque attendance, the strength of religious identification, and individual prayer shape support for gender equality in the public sphere in Western Europe are gendered, and depend on the hostility of the context, and have changed over the years (2008–2019). First, we expect that men and women engage differently with dominant religious doctrines because religious socialization and mainstream interpretations of religious prescriptions are gendered (Scheible and Fleischmann, 2013; Glas et al., 2018; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020). Additionally, we argue that Muslim citizens respond to hostile Western European societies that portray Muslims as gender traditional others by closing ranks and

reasserting the value of gender traditionalism, resulting in more reactionary religious interpretations (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Phalet et al., 2013). However, these processes have to be disentangled from another societal trend that prominent qualitative scholars have noted has happened simultaneously: the emergence of a more individualized, postmodern "European Islam" over time (Duderija, 2007b; Kaya, 2010; Cesari, 2014). If European Islam has gained ground, Muslims should have increasingly decoupled their religiosity from gender values over the years, even in the face of growing hostilities (Alba, 2005; Güngör et al., 2013; Glas, 2021; Röder and Spierings, 2022). Ultimately, this study sheds further light on the conditions under which Islamic religiosity is a barrier to emancipatory values—and when it can be a bridge (Foner and Alba, 2008).

Theory

The bulk of existing quantitative migration studies concludes that Islam hinders migrants' integration based on comparisons between Muslim minorities and natives (e.g., Diehl et al., 2009; Norris and Inglehart, 2012; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 2018). While these existing works show that people who adhere to a denomination and Muslims in particular average lower support for gender equality than non-religious people, this tells us little about how or why religiosity decreases gender egalitarianism. Indeed, qualitative migration scholars have shown great diversity in how Muslims live their religion, so there is no such thing as one (patriarchal) interpretation of Islam to which all Muslims adhere similarly (e.g., Duderija, 2007b; Jeldtoft, 2011). Similarly, sociologists of religion have long argued that religiosity cannot be flattened to denominational differences (e.g., Stark and Glock, 1968; Cornwall et al., 1986). They argue that "religion" is a complex phenomenon that spans multiple beliefs, feelings, and practices that are not interchangeable. This study, therefore, conceptualizes "religiosity" multi-dimensionally, which promises to lead to a more in-depth understanding of how exactly Islamic religiosity shapes gender attitudes.

More specifically, we disentangle mosque attendance, feelings of identification, and individual prayer. We do not argue that these three together provide a complete picture of Muslims' religiousness, but we do restrict our—already complex—theorization to these dimensions, which we can assess empirically in a context-diverse sample. The first dimension we focus on, mosque attendance, captures communal religious practices (Stark and Glock, 1968; Cornwall et al., 1986). Attending mosques differs from feelings of identification and individual prayer because it is a social affair, opening the door to group processes including social pressures to adjust to group norms and social sanctions when failing to do so.

Second, identification—also termed "belonging" or "devotion"—captures the affective beliefs or feelings dimension of religion (Cornwall et al., 1986). Counter to attending mosques, personal identifications do not entail contact with others who make you change your values to fit into a (conservative) community. As such, identification has been linked to gender egalitarianism in Muslim-majority contexts (Glas et al., 2019), but it remains unclear how Muslim identifications function in Western Europe, because they do not merely signify an attachment to a particular religion but also to a minority group with highly politicized boundaries (Duderija, 2007b; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Phalet et al., 2013).

Finally, prayer outside of mosques probably functions differently yet again, because it captures a religious practice that is in principle observable by others but, unlike mosque attendance, is not a group ritual (Stark and Glock, 1968; Cornwall et al., 1986). Being an individual practice in that sense, prayer could reflect both orthopraxy in upholding the *salat* pillar of Islam, as well as solitary moments of reflection on the meanings of Islam, rendering its effects on support for gender equality unclear.

All this means that mosque attendance, identification, and prayer might shape support for gender equality in completely different ways, as has been shown by other public opinion studies (e.g., Glas et al., 2018; Beller et al., 2021). This also means that, rather than one patriarchal interpretation of Islam to which all Muslims adhere, religiosities and their meanings are multiple. Indeed, public opinion works have shown that the ways Muslims connect their religiosity to gender values differ across groups and contexts (e.g., Jansen, 2004; Rinaldo, 2014; Glas et al., 2019; Glas and Alexander, 2020; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020). Therefore, any blanket conclusion that Islam is one unified force that only blocks emancipation seems unfounded or at least a simplification of reality, giving rise to the questions of what aspects of religiosity help versus hinder support for gender equality—and for whom and when.

This section provides our theoretical answer to those questions. First, we argue that mosque attendance, feelings of religious belonging, and individual prayer are likely to shape Muslims' support for gender equality in the public sphere *via* partly separate and gendered mechanisms. Thereafter, we propose that the impacts of these dimensions of religiosity are context-dependent, and we focus on two opposing societal trends: increasing hostility toward Muslims in Western European countries (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Fleischmann et al., 2011) and the emergence of more individualized, postmodern interpretations of Islam over time (Kaya, 2010; Cesari, 2014). An overview of our expectations can be found in Figure 1 at the end of this section.

Throughout our arguments, readers should keep in mind that we focus on support for gender equality *in the public sphere* in particular—again, due to cross-context data availability. We do not claim that our insights can be generalized further, as

dominant religious interpretations differ for varying gender values, and religiosity has been shown to be more loosely connected to public-sphere equality than to other gender values, such as the division of domestic duties and sexual liberalization (Glas, 2022b).

Mosques are patriarchal sites, but especially for women

Following the insights of a host of public opinion studies (e.g., Röder, 2014; Maliepaard and Alba, 2016; Glas et al., 2018), we expect that frequent mosque attendance generally curbs Muslim minorities' support for gender equality in the public sphere, for two reasons. First, when Muslims frequent mosques, they are exposed time and again to religious services that tend to be relatively conservative on women's role in the public sphere compared to views communicated in society at large (Baker et al., 2013). Those messages reinforce lower support for public-sphere gender equality when they are internalized. The authoritative status of imams makes questioning their conservative religious views difficult and believing what is shared in mosques more likely, catalyzing internalizations (Al-Hibri, 1982; Glas et al., 2019). Second, among Muslim minorities, frequent mosque attendance implies stronger integration into the conservative part of Muslim communities; because norms converge in groups *via* social pressures and sanctions, this would further hamper support for gender equality (Guveli et al., 2016; Beller et al., 2021; Röder and Spierings, 2022). This leads us to our general hypothesis that *more frequent mosque attendance reduces support for public-sphere gender equality* (hypothesis 1a).

At the same time, mosque attendance is highly gendered, as dominant religious interpretations stipulate that men should attend mosques frequently—at least for Friday prayers—whereas women are free to choose where to pray and thus face lower social pressures to attend mosques (Scheible and Fleischmann, 2013; Nyhagen, 2019). Qualitative studies have shown that women forego praying at mosques because they object to the genderedness of mosques, both in practical terms—such as the poor state of women's spaces and imams' lack of knowledge pertaining to women—and fundamentally—such as objections to gender segregation at mosques and not feeling included as an equal (Shannahan, 2014; Nyhagen, 2019; Ghafournia, 2020). This implies that women's self-selection for mosque attendance might be partly based on their gender attitudes, which is the first reason to expect gender differences.

Additionally, both of the mechanisms that underlie mosque attendance's patriarchal effects—internalizations of conservative sermons and norm convergence in conservative, mosque-going groups—are expected to feature more strongly among women. Qualitative studies have shown that the women who do choose to frequent mosques tend to do so not only for spiritual reasons

FIGURE 1
Overview of hypotheses.
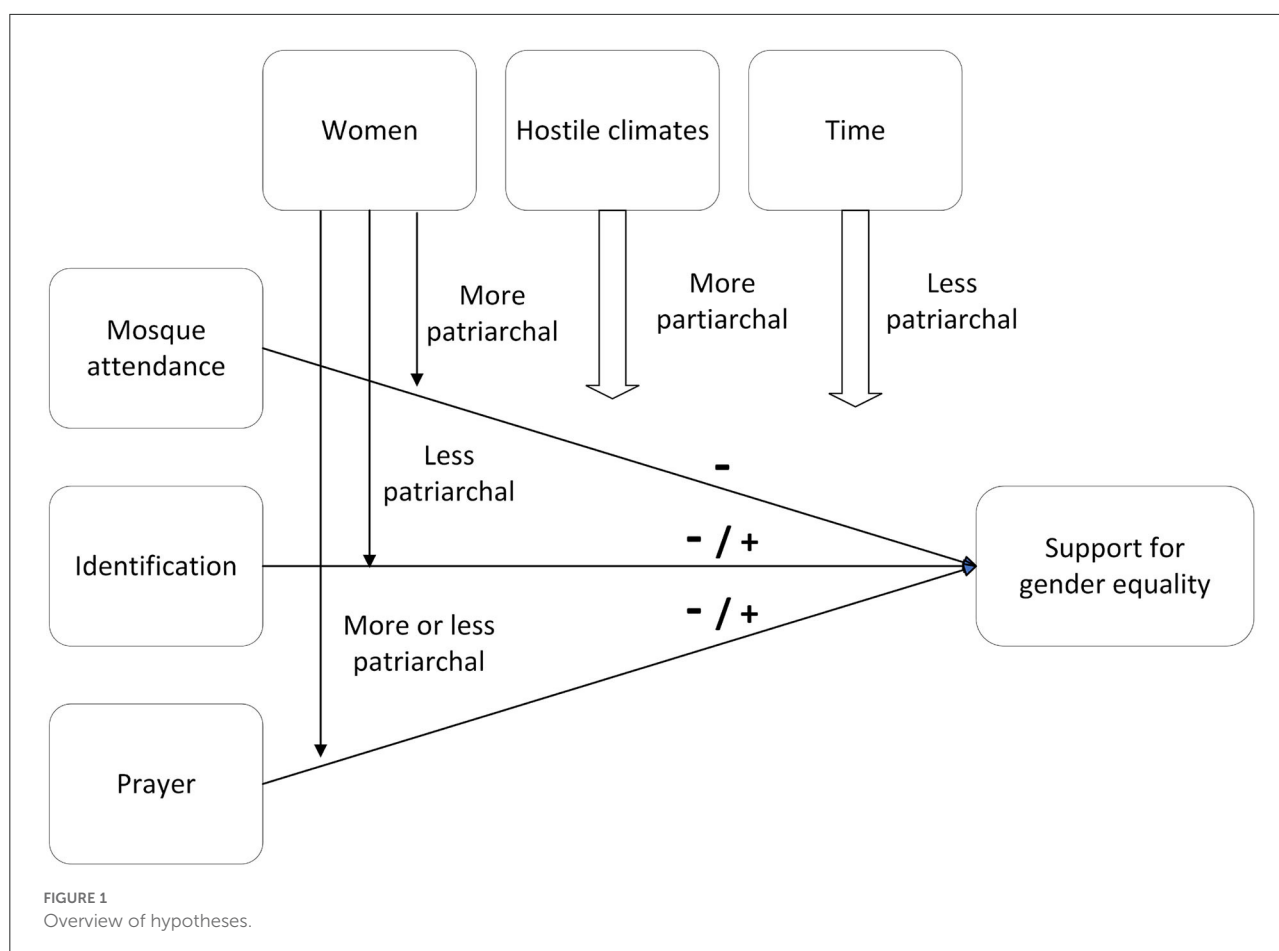
but also because they actively seek out the religious knowledge of imams and community engagement (Ghafournia, 2020). Therefore, we expect that especially women internalize imams' patriarchal religious interpretations and comply with the norms of the conservative religious community, which is in line with the findings of several public opinion studies (Glas et al., 2018, 2019; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020). We thus formulate the expectation that *more frequent mosque attendance is more strongly negatively related to public-sphere gender equality among women than among men* (hypothesis 1b).

Identifying with faith vs. a community

The second aspect of Islamic religiosity we disentangle—feelings of religious identification—have been linked to both conservative and progressive outcomes. Some studies report that stronger identification decreases progressive values (e.g., Kogan and Weißmann, 2020), whereas other studies find nil-effects (Glas et al., 2018), and yet others report identifications to increase support for gender equality (Glas et al., 2019). To

resolve this paradox, we propose that religious identifications set several processes in motion, some of them are more feminist, some are more patriarchal, and gendered processes might provide a first explanation of which gets the upper hand—another might flow from the context, as we will discuss further down below.

Building on insights from the sociology of religion and quantitative studies on Muslim-majority contexts, we expect that strong religious identifications have a feminist side. Sociologists of religion have argued that those who feel strongly attached to their religion are more likely to particularly take the main messages of their religion seriously, which include altruism, benevolence, and fairness, rather than just dogmatic rules (Saroglou et al., 2004; Bloom et al., 2015). For instance, dominant interpretations of Islam emphasize the importance of charity (*zakat*) and argue that judging people is up to Allah, not regular folk (El Fadl, 2001). This focus on benevolence among the strongly religiously identified, in turn, is expected to cause them to oppose discrimination, inequality, and intolerance (Spierings, 2019), which could explain why strongly identified Muslims have been reported to support gender equality more

(Glas et al., 2019). This leads us to expect that *stronger religious identifications increase support for public-sphere gender equality* (hypothesis 2a).

Nevertheless, these arguments are mainly built on contexts where Muslims are the dominant majority and Islam is the predominant thus normalized faith. However, in Western European countries, strongly identifying with one's Muslim identity does not only signify an attachment to a faith *pur sang* but also an attachment to the Muslim-minority community (Duderija, 2007b; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Phalet et al., 2013). This in turn implies a stronger orientation toward the community's (imagined) values, which have been constructed to include traditional gender roles (Güngör et al., 2013; Glas, 2021). Considering religious belonging from a minority perspective thus leads us to the opposite expectation that *stronger religious identifications decrease support for public-sphere gender equality* (hypothesis 2b).

The question now becomes: for who does religious belonging mainly function as an attachment to the general, benevolent tenets of Islam, and for whom does turning away from liberal values constructed as Western take the upper hand? We argue a gender perspective might provide some answers. First, we expect women to relate the main tenets of their religion more strongly to benevolence than men because religious socialization and religious interpretations are gendered (Duderija, 2007a; Rinaldo, 2014). Women's socialization in general tends to underscore caregiving, compassion, and empathy more than men's, and religious socialization is no different (Glas et al., 2018). Therefore, strongly religiously identified women are expected to emphasize benevolence in particular as one of the main tenets of their religion, which implies that the feminist effects of religious belonging might be stronger among women and weaker among men.

Second, how the linkage between religious identification and stronger attachment to the Muslim-minority community's values plays out, is wholly dependent on what those values are imagined to be. Men are probably more likely to unquestioningly accept traditional roles for women, as they might believe they benefit from traditionalism and do not perceive the harms. Women, however, are expected to more actively question what restricting their activities in the public sphere has to do with an Islamic identity, as a plethora of qualitative studies has shown that women actively search for and apply feminist interpretations to their religion (e.g., Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Ramji, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014). Altogether, this leads us to expect that the patriarchal effects of religious belonging are stronger for men, which is in line with the findings of other public opinion studies (Scheible and Fleischmann, 2013; Glas et al., 2018): *stronger religious identifications decrease support for public-sphere gender equality, especially among men* (hypothesis 2c).

The duality of individual prayer

The final dimension of religiosity we focus on is prayer outside of mosques. Like religious belonging, we argue that individual prayer could theoretically have both patriarchal and feminist effects—and gendered (and context-dependent) forces might tip the scales in favor of one or the other.

Frequent prayer could have patriarchal effects if it signifies orthopraxy—living orthodox religious interpretations through practices. In this view, Muslims who pray more often do so in part to comply with conservative interpretations of religious prescriptions—particularly *salat,* praying five times a day. This implies that often-praying Muslims are more likely to subscribe to conservative religious interpretations, which include opposing women's roles in the public sphere (Ji and Ibrahim, 2007; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020). Prayer as orthopraxy thus leads us to expect that: *Muslims who pray more frequently support public-sphere gender equality less* (hypothesis 3a).

At the same time, we should again note that conservative interpretations of religious prescriptions are gendered. For men, conservative prescriptions are geared toward praying together at mosques more than praying individually (Mirza, 2016; Nyhagen, 2019). This means that individual prayer might denote orthopraxy not so much among men as among women. This in turn implies that the patriarchal effects of prayer-as-orthopraxy feature more strongly among women: *more frequent individual prayer reduces support for public-sphere gender equality, especially among women* (hypothesis 3b).

However, prayer outside of mosques has also been linked to thoughtfully engaging with Islam rather than *salat* (Jeldtoft, 2011; Cesari, 2014). In that interpretation, prayer denotes reflecting on what Islam means (*ijtihad*) through personal conversations with Allah instead of only adopting the religious interpretations of the Islamic establishment (Duderija, 2007b; Kaya, 2010). Muslims would pray regularly not to fit conservative interpretations of religious prescriptions but rather to think about and even question those very prescriptions through personal conservations with Allah (Jeldtoft, 2011). If individual prayer indeed signals a reflective process that entails questioning the conservative religious establishment, we would expect prayer to have feminist effects: *Muslims who pray more frequently support public-sphere gender equality more* (hypothesis 3c).

The feminist effects of prayer might also be gendered, for two reasons. First, women probably utilize prayer for reflective moments more often than men, as qualitative studies have shown how varied women engage with their religion and its establishment thoughtfully and critically (e.g., Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Ramji, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014). Second, even among those who use prayer reflectively, women are expected to be more likely to reflect on the gender implications of their religion in particular (Glas et al., 2018). Men are expected to

be less likely to reflect on dominant religious interpretations of gender roles rather than other topics because their privileged status makes gender roles a less visible and pressing everyday concern to them. We thus arrive at the opposite expectation: *more frequent individual prayer* increases *support for public-sphere gender equality, especially among women* (hypothesis 3d).

Hostile hosts engender reactionary religiosity

Up to now, we have deduced arguments built on the multiplicity of religiosity and its gendered meanings, but this only captures the first part of our theoretical starting point. We now move on to the next part, which is that the meanings that are attached to religiosity's manifestations are not unchangeable and fixed but rather arise from context-dependent meaning-giving processes.

We start with the, at times, hostile climates toward Muslims in Western European host countries (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Fleischmann et al., 2011). Hostile climates can emanate from a range of actors, including political authorities, the judiciary, the media, and the general public, can be both formal and informal, and can be conscious exclusions as well as subconscious biases (Glas, 2022a). Hostile climates thus range from, for instance, laws prohibiting veiling in public spaces (formal, judiciary, and conscious) to negative characterizations of Muslims by government officials (informal, politicians, and (un)conscious) and anti-Muslim biases of the public (informal, public, and unconscious). The general undercurrent binding this broad spectrum together is that all hostilities construct the Muslim/non-Muslim divide as a bright boundary, whereby both groups are homogenized, differences within them overlooked and between them emphasized, and Muslims are constructed as the subordinate group. Because our theorization is already complex and as little work has been done on how these climates affect minorities' gender values at all (cf. Glas, 2022a; Röder and Spierings, 2022), we do not focus theoretically on how varying manifestations of hostility might have different effects. We instead empirically study a range of hostilities (formal and informal ones enacted by politics, judiciary, and the public, although mostly focused on conscious exclusions) and assess whether and how their effects differ empirically.

We expect hostile climates to affect the meanings Muslims attach to their religiosity through two mechanisms. The first is derived from the core thesis of social identity theory (SIT) that people strive for positive social identities—in our case, a positively-evaluated Muslim community (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). It is important to remember here that "social identity" does not merely denote a social category but also the significance of that category to people's self-concepts. Not all Muslims have some "Islamic social identity." Rather, Muslims

who are more strongly embedded in the community—through frequent mosque attendance—or more strongly attached to the community—through belonging—are expected to view Islam as more core to their social identity, whereas it is unclear that prayer, as an individual activity, similarly functions as an attachment to the Muslim community. As such, if societies are more hostile toward Muslims, Muslims who attend religious services more often and who identify as religious more strongly are expected to feel that their social identity is rejected[1].

When social identities are met with hostility, SIT predicts that people employ coping strategies, one of which entails re-valuing the traits deemed negative by the dominant native majority as positive, thereby creating a positive social identity in the face of rejection (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Branscombe et al., 1999)[2]. As hostile European societies portray Muslims as foreign "others" based in part on their supposed lack of support for "the core Western value" of gender equality and their religion (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Yilmaz, 2015; Geurts and Van Klingeren, 2021), Muslims who frequent mosques and strongly identified Muslims are thus expected to re-assert the value of gender traditionalism in particular in hostile contexts (Phalet et al., 2013; Glas, 2021, 2022a; Röder and Spierings, 2022). Especially qualitative studies have shown how Muslims do just that, for instance arguing against the worth of sexual liberalization by slut-shaming non-migrant women who "sleep around" "as if they have no values" (Le Espiritu, 2001); see also (Ajrouch, 2004; Giuliani et al., 2017; Glas, 2021). Although quantitative studies are limited in this respect, Röder and Spierings (2022) have shown that discrimination does indeed strengthen the link between religiosity and hostility toward homosexuality. This all leads us to expect that hostile contexts beget reactionary religiosity especially among strongly identified Muslims and those who often attend mosque services.

The second mechanism that underpins the conditioning impact of hostile climates concerns the intra-community dynamics of external conflicts (Coser, 1956). When communities face an external threat, they are expected to close ranks, as it were, whereby community norms are sharpened and pressures to stick to them grow. This is especially likely

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1   In more hostile contexts, belonging as attachment to faith is also expected to give way to religious belonging as orientation toward the minority community, because those contexts politicize Islam, rendering it a brighter boundary denoting different communities, thereby emphasizing that commitment to Islam entails commitment to a particular minority community (Alba and Nee, 2003).

2   Some of those strategies—including leaving the group, directly competing with the outgroup, or comparing the in-group with another, even more devalued out-group—are not expected to be available to or widely adopted by Muslims, because of the religion-tied nature of their group boundary and their overall low status in Western European countries.

to occur when a "subordinated" community (e.g., Muslims) is threatened by a dominant one (e.g., "native" whites), because subordinate communities lack the power to challenge the threat in other ways. In Western European societies that are more hostile toward them, Muslim citizens are thus expected to create more of a united front against the antagonist (cf. Fleischmann et al., 2011; Guveli et al., 2016; Beller et al., 2021). Consequently, in more hostile contexts, Muslims are expected to close opportunities for intra-community discussions and instead create one front with one set of values to which all members are expected to stick—and sanction transgressions severely (Coser, 1956).

In turn, closing ranks in hostile host societies is expected to strengthen the patriarchal impact of mosque attendance, religious belonging, and individual prayer in similar ways but for different reasons. First, we expect conservative norm convergence in mosque-going communities to be stronger in more hostile contexts. In those contexts, pressures to stick to community norms mount, and transgressing norms are more harshly sanctioned (Guveli et al., 2016; Beller et al., 2021; Röder and Spierings, 2022). Second, because hostile contexts signal that Muslims are necessarily "other" to the Western European community and its values (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Yilmaz, 2015), we expect strongly identified Muslims to close ranks by turning away from the values portrayed as fundamentally European, including public-sphere gender equality, in more hostile contexts (Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007; Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012; Eskelinen and Verkuyten, 2020; Glas, 2022a). Finally, we expect that the feminist potential of prayer is curbed in hostile contexts because reflecting on community norms and questioning dominant conservative religious identifications is discouraged when communities close ranks (Duderija, 2007b; Jeldtoft, 2011; Cesari, 2014). Altogether, we expect that: *In more hostile European countries, more frequent mosque attendance* (hypothesis 4a), *stronger religious identifications* (hypothesis 4b), *and more frequent individual prayer* (hypothesis 4c) *are more strongly related to opposition to public-sphere gender equality.*

Again, these relations might also be gendered, and we might tentatively expect that hostile contexts engender such reactionary religious interpretations among women especially. The reason is that women are expected to be the ones who utilized the space to deviate from patriarchal religious interpretations in less hostile societies in the first place, as qualitative studies have shown (Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Ramji, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014). Therefore, especially women's progressive religious interpretations are expected to be restricted in more hostile host societies. Additionally, women are expected to be socially sanctioned more harshly than men when they transgress community norms because women are in less powerful positions and tend to be made into symbols of the community (Le Espiritu, 2001; Ajrouch, 2004; Giuliani et al., 2017; Glas, 2021). Consequently, in more hostile contexts that more strictly uphold community norms, especially women's

transgressions might be sanctioned and sanctioned more harshly, leading them to stick to reactive community norms more so than men. Altogether, hostile hosts might condition the relations between religiosity and gender values in gendered ways, which we shall address empirically.

Emerging European Islam drives decoupling

Lastly, Muslims might also respond to increasingly hostile societies by adjusting how they live their religion over the years (Phalet et al., 2013). Qualitative migration scholars have argued just that and proposed that, in the face of narratives that Islam would necessarily oppose gender equality, Muslims have been increasingly individually reflecting on what Islam means to them; an individualized, postmodern European Islam has been emerging over the years (Duderija, 2007b; Kaya, 2010; Cesari, 2014). This individualized Islam has, in Jeldtoft's (2011, p. 1137) words, "a strong focus on autonomy and the personal experience as opposed to religious authority and fixed traditions"—it is "'un-churched', privatized and also quite pluralistic and inclusive." Likewise, Duderija (2007a) argues that in recent years, Muslims would have started to question the conservative interpretations of religious authorities as imams more regularly, arguing that those interpretations are too rigid because they overlook the importance of the migration context. The religious interpretations of the establishment that deny women equal access to the public sphere would increasingly be viewed as "cultural" rather than "religious"—perhaps suited to stayers in, for instance, Pakistan but not to Muslims in Europe (Predelli, 2004; Naber, 2005; Ramji, 2007). These arguments from qualitative studies thus lead us to expect that, over the years, European Muslims' religious interpretations have been changing in a liberal direction, which has also been found by several quantitative studies (Röder and Mühlau, 2014; Phalet et al., 2018).

If an individualized, European Islam has indeed been gaining ground, Islamic religiosities are expected to be increasingly decoupled from gender values over the years (Röder, 2014; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020; Glas, 2022b; Röder and Spierings, 2022). What is proclaimed in religious services would be detached from life outside of mosques, as imams' conservative religious interpretations are increasingly reflected upon rather than indiscriminately adopted (Duderija, 2007a). Strongly identifying as Muslim would not imply unquestioningly adopting the imagined values of the Muslim community, but rather deliberating what Islam means to you individually (see also Röder and Mühlau, 2014; Spierings, 2015; Phalet et al., 2018). Fewer and fewer Muslims would use prayer as orthopraxy as religious prescriptions are questioned, and, instead, prayer would be increasingly utilized as a moment to

reflect on religious meanings. Altogether, this leads us to expect that Islamic religiosities have been increasingly decoupled from traditional gender values over time: *In more recent years, more frequent mosque attendance* (hypothesis 5a)*, stronger religious identifications* (hypothesis 5b)*, and more frequent individual prayer* (hypothesis 5c) *are more weakly related to opposition to public-sphere gender equality*.

Decoupling might also be gendered, and we might tentatively expect that especially women have increasingly decoupled their religion from opposition to gender equality over time. The reasons are that women tend to use spaces for religious reinterpretation more and in more feminist ways, for instance, because they experience the sting of patriarchal religious interpretations more personally in their daily lives (Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Ramji, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014; Glas et al., 2018; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020). Consequently, if a more progressive European Islam has been emerging, women are likely to be the driving force behind it—at least in the case of progressive religious reinterpretations of gender relations. Indeed, existing work suggests that women more so than men have increasingly reinterpreted their religion, moving away from opposition to gender equality (Röder and Spierings, 2022). Therefore, we will also empirically address whether changes in the relations between religiosity and gender values are gendered.

Methods

Synchronizing survey sources

Cross-national studies into minorities' values and behaviors are limited by the data available. A major obstacle is that migrant-specific datasets tend to cover only a few contexts, while cross-national datasets tend to include a rather limited number of migrant-background citizens. To make more general claims (Spierings, 2016) and because we are interested in contextual effects (concerning hostility), this obstacle needs to be overcome.

This study uses a pooled dataset that combines all Muslim respondents from multiple (general and migrant-specific) cross-national surveys. Evidently, it would have been more ideal to have data from an annual migrant-specific survey in all Western European countries, for a time span of over 20 years, with representative migrant-background samples. Those data do not exist and will not exist soon. By pooling cross-national surveys and adjusting for measurement differences as other studies on similar topics have done (Spierings 2018, Spierings, 2019) and as we describe below and in Appendices A–C, we can create a database with over 10,000 potential Muslim respondents from all Western European countries, covering all years since 2000.

We selected the European Social Survey, European Values Study, World Values Survey, 2,000 Families data, and EURISLAM, because these surveys all include at least six

Western European countries—in order to be able to build on similar measurements across countries—and measurements of our core concepts (gender attitudes, mosque attendance, identification, and prayer). After selection of self-identified Muslims (based on denomination) and valid scores on core variables, we were left with a dataset with no fewer than 9,461 Muslim respondents in 16 countries, covering a time span of 12 years. Due to our standardization procedures to harmonize the data discussed below, we cannot present descriptive figures on the current state of affairs but we can compare respondents and study the impact of Islamic religiosity in new ways, our main focus. Nevertheless, to further establish the robustness of our pooled results, we have also estimated their effects per survey source (Appendix D1, and split by gender in Appendix D2), as will be discussed as part of the results section.

Support for gender equality in the public sphere

To measure gender equality, we first selected items that theoretically fit support for gender equality *in the public sphere*. We do so as public-sphere equality is (a) covered by more surveys, (b) the predominant focus in the existing literature, and (c) connected to Islamic religiosity differently than other gender values (see Glas, 2022b; Glas et al., 2019). After conceptual reflections and estimating factor analyses (details in Appendix B), we concluded five sub-dimensions fit together well and measure our concept of interest: support for (i) female political leadership and (ii) business leadership, (iii) equal importance of higher education for girls and boys, and (iv) women's right to a job and (v) not considering men the sole proper breadwinners. Each of these relates to women being present in the public sphere and taking positions of power.

Evidently, these five different elements do vary to the degree they are considered controversial religiously or simply how widespread their support is (Glas, 2022b). To create an index valid across surveys, we re-categorized the answers if questions were the same but answer categories differed. Then, pivotally, we standardized (z-scored: mean = 0; SD = 1) each item separately, which takes into account how much support there is for a certain form of public equality (akin to β-values in regression models). If a certain form of equality is supported less on average, answering positively on this item gives respondents a relatively higher score. Of these resulting standardized variables, we took the mean per respondent (based on the available scores), which provides us with the degree of support for gender equality in the public sphere of each respondent relative to the others.

Islamic religiosity

Mosque attendance is asked across surveys with questions with at their core "How often do you attend religious services?" and four to seven answer options that range from never to daily. Across surveys we could regroup the answers to capture 0 "never to less than yearly," 1 "yearly to monthly," 2 "weekly," and 3 "more than weekly" (details in Appendix C).

For respondents' religious *identification*, we selected items that are part of the subdimension of affective religiosity (see Stark and Glock, 1968; Cornwall et al., 1986; Glas et al., 2018). In each survey source, at least one indicator for one of the following three question types was present: the degree to which one sees oneself as Muslim, considers themselves religious, and the importance they attach to God or religion in their lives (see Appendix C). In existing studies, these three have been combined to measure identification among Muslim respondents and they have been empirically shown to tap one underlying concept (Glas et al., 2018; Spierings, 2019). Of the five available items across surveys, two are available together in multiple WVS and EVS rounds, each of a different question type: religiousness and importance of God. Despite one having only three answering options, these two correlate well over 0.4 in our data ($p < 0.001$), indicating they go together. Building on the procedure used in the studies mentioned above, we standardized each item, and then averaged the available standardized scores, which ascribes each respondent a score on religious identification relative to the other respondents.

Individual prayer was measured by questions that share a stem reading "How often do you pray?". Three out of five surveys explicitly refer to praying *apart from or outside of religious services* in the question stem and a fourth makes this distinction in the answering options (WVS; details in Appendix C). Only the EurIslam questionnaire is not that explicit. The data suggest the risk of bias toward *individual* praying is minimal, as over 90 percent of respondents who say to pray daily or more frequently do not attend mosque daily, while of those attending mosque daily over 90 percent does pray daily. Especially considering that we also add mosque attendance (or: social prayer) to our models, in the EurIslam data praying during services is at the best a very small part of the reported prayer, hardly influencing the answers given the answering categories. Across surveys, we could regroup the answers categories, ranging from five to eight options, into four options across surveys: 0 "(practically) never", 1 "less than weekly," 2 "at least weekly," and 3 "daily or more often."

Context-level independent variables

We measure "hostility" in three different ways to capture different manifestations of hostile climates (formal and informal, emanating from the public, politicians, and the judiciary) based on exploratory factor analyses on 10 macro-level items (details in Appendix H). First, *hostile public attitudes* are based on aggregated scores from the European Social Survey's population samples covering a range of anti-migrant attitudes (European Social Survey a., 2016; European Social Survey b., 2016; European Social Survey c., 2018). Second, the presence of *populist radical right-wing parties* is based on publicly available national parliamentary election results. Finally, *political and social harassment* is based on a combination of the Global Restrictions on Religion Data coded by the Pew Research Center (Grim, 2019) and a newly created indicator. From the GRRD, we use two indicators: one on the social harassment of Islam (e.g., physical coercion or negative public comments by members of the public) and one on the political harassment of Islam (e.g., physical coercion or negative public comments by government officials). The third element in this index is a newly coded indicator regarding veil bans in national law, which provides a gender-specific form of legal harassment. Across these indices, a higher score indicates a higher degree of hostility.

Note that all hostilities are coded at the country (-year) level. Most of the manifestations of hostile climates we consider only pertain to countries (e.g., national laws, governments). However, hostile public attitudes occur at the subnational level as well. Such regional hostilities probably have stronger effects on the public than national ones, assuming that people are more likely to perceive hostilities closer to them (Spierings, 2015). Unfortunately, aggregations at the subnational level were impossible because the regional locations of respondents are not always known. Still, if anything, this might only lead to an underestimation of some of our effects.

We test whether the impact of Islamic religiosity has changed over the years (hypothesis 5) by including *year* as a contextual interaction factor. In line with our theoretical reasoning, the year is included as a linear variable, whereby we set the first year available to 0 and count onward, based on the year of the interview. To avoid type-2 errors and following our theoretical logic of time tapping societal change, we include the year as a contextual variable.

Control variables

Age was measured in years. We also included whether the respondent was born in the country of destination, in another country, or whether this is unknown. For respondents' education level, we distinguished between no education, primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education, and again unknown. We use dummy variables with a separate category for respondents with missing values on a specific variable in order not to lose cases, particularly so because missing values on for instance education are hardly ever non-selective. On people's main activity (or "employment status"), we make a distinction between being employed (making

a considerable number of hours), being in education, and being neither. Lastly, relationship status was measured in the categories married/partnered, never married, and others (including divorcees and widows)[3].

Model configuration

Given our data include individuals from various countries and years, we estimate three-level models: individuals nested in country-years nested in countries, with random intercepts at both higher levels. To control for differences between surveys and years, we instrumentally include dummies for the different *source surveys* (and we include a linear year variable to test hypothesis 5). This modeling strategy assures that macro-level differences between countries, years, and surveys (including the presence of specific items) in terms of support for gender equality are filtered out. Further details on model configuration are provided in Appendix E. We have also estimated our models per survey source (see Appendix D1) and discuss divergent results in the main text.

With respect to assessing the different effects of religiosity between men and women, we estimate split models throughout our study to avoid hard-to-interpret three-way interactions. However, while they show if certain effects are for instance statistically significant for men but not for women, these models do not include a formal test of whether this difference itself is statistically significant. To assess this we also specified a model including interaction terms with gender (see Appendix G), which we take into account when discussing our results in the text below.

Results

Gendering Islamic religiosities

Although later analyses tell a more complex story, Model 1 in Table 1 shows that Islamic religiosity reduces support for gender equality in the public sphere. This model is most akin to standard studies on Islamic religiosity and gender equality, showing averages across two genders and different Western European contexts (e.g., Diehl et al., 2009; Norris and Inglehart, 2012). Here, we find that Muslims who attend mosques more often, who identify as more religious, and who pray more often on average support public-sphere gender equality significantly less than others.

However, as the results in Appendix D1 show, there as some important nuances. The effect of attendance is most robust across survey sources, whereas that of prayer is present

in the total sample, but picked up far less clearly by the separate samples[4]. When we separate different gender values (see Appendix F), we similarly find that attendance has the most general negative and significant effect, whereas identification and prayer show significant negative effects and nil-effects[5]. We would thus conclude on the overall average effects that Islamic religiosity is always a barrier to integration and emancipation, as others have done before, if we stopped here and had not studied Islam with attention to gender or context.

However, estimating our models for men and women separately already lays bare several divergent patterns (see Models 2a and 2b in Table 1; full interaction model in Appendix G; per-gender per-survey source models in Appendix D2). This underscores the importance of nuance in studying the effects of Islamic religiosities. Our only dimension of religiosity significantly reduces support for gender equality in the public sphere among both men and women in mosque attendance. Still, even the negative effect of mosque attendance is found per gender across surveys and this cannot simply be accounted for pointing out the reduced statistical power (see Appendix D2)[6]. Therefore, we accept hypothesis 1a and reject the gendered effect of mosque attendance specified in hypothesis 1b. Rather than Islam writ large, these results imply that the barrier to support for gender equality among Muslim minorities in Western Europe is frequent mosque attendance in particular (in line with Guveli et al., 2016; Glas et al., 2019; Beller et al., 2021).

Neither religious identification nor individual prayer is found to decrease support for gender equality in the public sphere among both men and women (especially when survey differences are considered, see Appendix D2)[7]. First, men who

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[3] Details on the harmonization, including the full code, can be obtained from the authors.

[4] For attendance, all five coefficient are negative and four are statistically significant. For identification, three coefficients are significant, all negative. For praying only one coefficient is significant and one more is marginally significant, both being negative, implying that the negative average impact would not be picked up without the pooling of data.

[5] We find indications that different gender values are differently shaped by Islamic religiosity (Glas et al., 2019; Glas, 2022b), particularly political leadership and university education. Prayer does not significantly reduce support for equality in political leadership, and neither identification nor prayer significantly reduces support for equality in education. These results underscore existing understandings that religiosity shapes different gender values in different ways (Glas et al., 2019; Glas, 2022b). Although we find no indications of religiosity being a bridge toward gender equality, these results further rebuke claims that Islam is necessarily a barrier to integration (Foner and Alba, 2008).

[6] Mosque attendance has a negative and significant impact among women in 3 out of 5 surveys and among men in only 1 survey.

[7] Identification's negative and significant effect among men is replicated in three (out of five) subsamples. Identification's non-significant effect among women is replicated throughout subsamples (two non-significant effects are positive). This supports the finding

TABLE 1 Multilevel regression models estimating the impact of Islamic religiosity on support for gender equality in the public sphere among self-identified Muslim citizens in Western Europe (2008−2019).

FIXED EFFECTS	Model 1 Base model		Model 2a Women Base model for men and women separately		Model 2b Men	
	B	p	B	p	B	p
Intercept	**6.89**	0.000	**7.05**	0.000	**7.07**	0.000
MICRO-LEVEL VARIABLES OF INTEREST						
Attendance	**−0.19**	0.000	**−0.20**	0.000	**−0.19**	0.000
Identification	**−0.09**	0.000	−0.04	0.227	**−0.14**	0.000
Individual praying	**−0.05**	0.016	**−0.09**	0.001	−0.01	0.684
MICRO-LEVEL CONTROL VARIABLES						
Female (ref = no)	**0.43**	0.000				
Age (in years)	**−0.01**	0.000	**−0.01**	0.006	**−0.01**	0.002
Place of birth (ref = country of living)						
Abroad	**−0.16**	0.001	−0.05	0.465	**−0.24**	0.001
Unknown	0.10	0.578	0.05	0.851	0.06	0.823
Education level (ref = no education)						
Primary education	−0.01	0.929	0.08	0.538	−0.05	0.678
Secondary education	0.09	0.307	0.16	0.190	0.06	0.617
Tertiary education	**0.28**	0.002	**0.26**	0.039	**0.30**	0.018
Unknown	0.08	0.503	0.22	0.164	0.00	0.984
Main activity (ref = no work or <12 h)						
(self-)Employed, 12 h or more	**0.28**	0.000	**0.33**	0.000	**0.18**	0.002
In education	**0.38**	0.000	**0.36**	0.001	0.22	0.097
Relationship status (ref = never married)						
Married/Legal partnership / Living together	−0.10	0.075	**−0.29**	0.000	0.10	0.231
Other (incl. Divorced/Widowed)	−0.01	0.933	−0.15	0.153	0.12	0.376
MACRO-LEVEL VARIABLES						
Hostile public attitudes (factor score centered)	**−0.30**	0.029	**−0.31**	0.034	**−0.30**	0.050
Strength PRR (factor score centered)	−0.19	0.128	−0.11	0.388	−0.22	0.127
Social and political harassment (factor score centered)[a]	na		na		na	

(Continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

FIXED EFFECTS	Model 1		Model 2a Women		Model 2b Men	
	Base model		Base model for men and women separately			
	B	*p*	**B**	*p*	**B**	*p*
SYSTEM VARIABLES						
Time (in years; 2008 = 0)	**0.07**	0.003	**0.12**	0.000	**0.05**	0.089
Source survey (ref = EurIslam)						
ESS	**−0.41**	0.000	0.01	0.950	**−0.63**	0.000
WVS	**0.44**	0.034	**0.72**	0.006	−0.04	0.890
EVS	−0.20	0.322	−0.21	0.397	−0.30	0.233
2,000 Families	**1.28**	0.000	**1.27**	0.000	**1.30**	0.000
RANDOM EFFECTS						
Country Level						
Intercept	**0.21**	0.082	0.20	0.137	**0.26**	0.089
Country-year level						
Intercept	**0.29**	0.000	**0.29**	0.002	**0.29**	0.001
MODEL STATISTICS						
BIC	37,076.518		16,489.213		20,573.783	
Nind	9,461		4,311		5,150	
Nctryyr	127		125		125	
Nctry	16		16		16	

[a] Here this variable is left out as fewer contexts are covered by it, which would lead to a loss of cases testing the first hypotheses, while we still control for macro-level differences.
Coefficients in bold are significant at p < 0.05 or, in the case of macro-level variables, at p < 0.1.

more strongly identify as religious support public-sphere gender equality significantly less, but women do not. These results falsify hypotheses 2a and 2b, which argued identification's effects would be similar among men and women, in favor of hypothesis 2c, which proposed a gendered effect of identification. These results might indicate that religious identification indeed partly reflects the attachment to the Muslim community and its imagined values in Western Europe, whereby men accept that those values include traditional gender roles, but women resist that notion. This would lead more strongly identified men but not more strongly identified women to oppose gender equality (Duderija, 2007b; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Phalet et al., 2013).

Our results show that the effects of individual prayer are also gendered, but the other way around. Although the interaction between praying and gender is only significant at *p<0.06* in cross-gender models (see Appendix G), our results show that,

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that identification matters more clearly and negatively among men. On praying, two significant effects, both negative, are found among women, while among men two effects are significant but in different directions. This indicates that the negative effect is more robust among women, albeit just, and that prayer is hardly an insurmountable barrier to emancipation.

among women, praying significantly reduces support for public-sphere gender equality, while, among men, individual prayer has no significant effect at all. These results support hypothesis 3b and falsify hypotheses 3a, 3c, and 3d. Individual prayer might reflect orthopraxy among women, so that often-praying women are more orthodox and conservative on gender matters as well, but not among men, as orthodox men probably believe they are required to pray not individually but in mosques (Mirza, 2016; Nyhagen, 2019).

Islamic religiosities in hostile environments

Moving on to the importance of environments, starting with hostility, our results generally show that Muslims support public-sphere gender equality less in more hostile European countries, particularly in terms of hostile public attitudes (Models 1 and 2 in Table 1)[8]. This is in line with general arguments from social identity theory and the dynamics of

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8 The strength of the PRR also shows the expected negative coefficient but is not statistically significant at conventional levels (cf. Glas, 2022a). Only including this macro-level variable shows a similar result at *p* = 0.135. While this is not certain enough to draw strong conclusions, such

external conflict that communities retreat when under threat (in line with Glas, 2022a; Röder and Spierings, 2022). Populist signals that Muslims do not belong in Western Europe because Islam opposes women's empowerment and thus indeed seem to backlashes in support for gender equality among Muslims (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Mayer et al., 2014; Yilmaz, 2015; Spierings and Glas, 2021).

The question at hand now is whether hostile environments also cause Muslims to interpret their religion differently and in more reactionary, patriarchal ways. Table 2 shows models that test whether Islamic religiosity's impact is context-dependent. In general, we do find some indications that Muslims live their religion differently in more hostile contexts, but definitely not in every case and not always in the expected direction.

First, the impact of mosque attendance is not significantly altered—in either direction—in more hostile European contexts (see Models 3 and 4). These results falsify hypothesis 4a; it seems that Muslims who are exposed more frequently to generally conservative sermons internalize these messages, regardless of gender or the hostility of the European context (countering Glas et al., 2018; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020; Röder and Spierings, 2022; more in line with Scheible and Fleischmann, 2013). Overall, the negative impact of mosque attendance on support for public-sphere gender equality seems pretty robust across genders, outcomes, and contexts.

The impact of religious identification, on the other hand, does seem to differ from the hostility of the European context, but in the direction opposite to our expectations (see Models 3 and 4). Generally, our results provide several indications that in more hostile contexts, religious identification's patriarchal effects are weaker rather than stronger. These results are not univocal and less robust, but no indications of a strengthening effect are found, clearly falsifying hypothesis 4b. As our results tend to reach marginal levels of statistical significance which we deem non-trivial given the number of higher-level units, and they do consistently point in the same direction, we tentatively conclude that contexts with more hostile institutions, but not publics, weaken the negative relationship between religious identification and support for public-sphere gender equality[9]. If so, we suggest this might indicate that when Western European Muslims encounter hostile environments that question the gender attitudes of their communities, they do not respond by re-appropriating the value of gender traditionalism. Rather, they might re-imagine their community values in a more liberal direction, as we shall return to in the conclusion (Verkuyten and Reijerse, 2008; Geurts and Van Klingeren, 2021; Dickey et al., 2022).

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a result on a low macro-level n further supports the conclusion we draw for hostility more generally, based on public attitudes variables.

9 Results can be obtained from the authors. Hostile contexts do not significantly increase religious identification, so we find no indication of rejection-identification (Branscombe et al., 1999).

Turning to our third dimension of religiosity, our results indicate that prayer's patriarchal effects might strengthen in more hostile European contexts, as expected (see Models 3 and 4). In contexts with stronger populist right-wing parties, the negative impact of prayer on support for public-sphere gender equality intensifies among men, in accordance with hypothesis 4c. However, the same is not found for harassing policies, while for hostile public attitudes we find one such indication among women (and twice in Appendix G when estimated separately). So, we can only suggest that when they are met with hostility, some Muslims might respond by attaching more reactionary meanings to their prayer. Another possibility, to which we shall also return in the conclusion, is that hostile environments cause Muslims to pray less outside of services—especially those who would otherwise pray very often—for instance because Muslims fear being harassed if they pray at work. If those reductions in prayer in hostile contexts are stronger than the reductions in support for public-sphere gender equality, this would also cause the connection between prayer and opposition to gender equality to strengthen.

Overall, we do not find overwhelming support for the notion that hostile European contexts spur reactionary religiosity. But we also cannot report that hostile contexts do not affect the meanings Muslims attach to their religion (countering Röder and Spierings, 2022). Our results paint a complex picture, whereby religious identification and prayer are affected by some hostilities but not others, which sometimes beget more feminist effects of religiosity and sometimes more patriarchal ones. We return to this in the conclusion, because these results might actually feed into a broader understanding of how different dimensions of religiosity relate to support for gender equality.

Islamic religiosities over time

Finally turning to changes over time, our results show that European Muslims' support for public-sphere gender equality has increased over the years (see all models), which is in line with qualitative scholars' arguments on the emergence of an individualized and more progressive European Islam (Duderija, 2007b; Kaya, 2010; Cesari, 2014). At the same time, our results do not consistently show that Islamic religiosities have been increasingly decoupled from support for public-sphere gender equality (see Model 5 in Table 2), which refutes hypotheses 5a–c. While European Muslims have become more gender-egalitarian over the years, this does not seem to be due to them interpreting their religion in more feminist ways. Indeed, additional models provide indications that religious attendance, identification, and prayer have, on average, risen over time simultaneously.

Interestingly, we do find one relatively clear case of decoupling religiosity and gender attitudes, and it is among men. Men who more strongly identify as religious support gender equality less (see Model 2b in Table 1), but this effect has become significantly weaker over time (see Model 3b in Table 2).

TABLE 2 Summarized multilevel regression models estimating the context-dependent impact of Islamic religiosity on support for gender equality in the public sphere among self-identified Muslim citizens in Western Europe (2008−2019).

	Model 3a Women		Model 3b Men		Model 4a Women		Model 4b Men		Model 5a Women		Model 5b Men	
	Hostility model 2 factors				Hostility model 3 factors				Decoupling model			
FIXED EFFECTS	B	p	B	p	B	p	B	p	B	p	B	p
MICRO-LEVEL VARIABLES OF INTEREST												
Attendance[a]	**−0.20**	0.001	**−0.19**	0.012	**−0.19**	0.016	−0.22	0.196	−0.28	0.183	**−0.28**	0.073
* Hostile public attitudes	0.03	0.647	−0.01	0.858	0.04	0.555	0.07	0.598				
* Strength PRR	0.01	0.831	0.04	0.593	0.00	0.951	0.05	0.666				
* Harassing policies					−0.04	0.748	−0.01	0.977				
* time									−0.00	0.892	0.01	0.783
Identification[a]	−0.01	0.927	**−0.09**	0.045	**−0.19**	0.058	**−0.29**	0.010	−0.13	0.494	**−0.24**	0.023
* Hostile public attitudes	0.05	0.539	0.02	0.684	−0.10	0.287	−0.00	0.973				
* Strength PRR	0.09	0.209	**0.09**	0.064	0.11	0.200	**0.11**	0.054				
* Harassing policies					**0.30**	0.054	**0.21**	0.078				
* time									0.04	0.227	**0.03**	0.025
Individual praying[a]	**−0.09**	0.056	−0.07	0.293	−0.02	0.779	−0.04	0.635	0.01	0.912	−0.04	0.758
* Hostile public attitudes	**−0.12**	0.024	−0.01	0.893	−0.05	0.355	−0.02	0.782				
* Strength PRR	−0.07	0.120	**−0.16**	0.014	−0.03	0.561	**−0.17**	0.033				
* Harassing policies					−0.06	0.567	0.02	0.863				
* time									−0.02	0.199	−0.03	0.245
INTERACTION VARIABLES												
Hostile public attitudes (factor score centered)	−0.09	0.586	−0.21	0.298	−0.17	0.334	−0.22	0.357	**−0.28**	0.037	**−0.29**	0.045
Strength PRR (factor score centered)	0.01	0.944	0.05	0.761	−0.06	0.718	0.12	0.593	−0.11	0.349	**−0.25**	0.071
Harassing policies (factor score centered)					0.12	0.689	−0.45	0.214				
Time (in years; 2008 = 0)	**0.14**	0.000	**0.05**	0.057	**0.14**	0.001	**0.09**	0.014	**0.16**	0.015	0.07	0.242

(Continued)

TABLE 2 Continued

FIXED EFFECTS	Model 3a Women		Model 3b Men		Model 4a Women		Model 4b Men		Model 5a Women		Model 5b Men	
	Hostility model 2 factors				Hostility model 3 factors				Decoupling model			
	B	p	B	p	B	p	B	p	B	p	B	p
MICRO-LEVEL CONTROL VARIABLES	Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded	
SYSTEM VARIABLES												
Source survey (ref = EurIslam)	Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded		Inlcuded	
RANDOM EFFECTS												
Country Level												
Intercept	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Country Year Level												
Intercept	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Belonging/Identification	X		X		X		X					
Attendance	X		X		X		X					
Individual praying	X		X		X		X					
Year Level												
Intercept									X		X	
Belonging/Identification									X		X	
Attendance									X		X	
Individual praying									X		X	
MODEL STATISTICS												
BIC	16,574.515		20,647.999		14,998.614		18,953.176		16,569.998		20,665.278	
Nind	4,311		5,150		3,922		4,750		4,311		5,150	
Nctryyr	125		125		67		68		125		125	
Nctry	16		16		14		15		16		16	
Nyr									10		10	

[a] To make sure we do not make type-2 errors in concluding a context-dependent effect (hypotheses 4 and 5), the religiosity variables are included in the random part of the model. This allows for a stringent test of the interaction terms' statistical significance, but biases religiosity's main effects' p highly upward (type-1 errors). In other words, these models should only be used to assess whether the effects of religiosity differ over time and by context.

As all coefficients in this model are based either on macro-level variables or on micro-level variables included in the random part of the model, the coefficients p < 0.1 are given in bold. This indicates that a noteworthy correlation might exist. In the text, the interpretation is given, which considers all models provided here and in the appendices, additional robustness tests, and substantial significance.

This implies that men are slowly starting to decouple religious identifications from gender values, as women have already done (see Model 2a in Table 1) (countering Röder, 2014; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020). Therefore, although these results do not support the claim that Muslims have started to decouple their religiosity writ large from their gender values over time, we do find that men are gradually starting to let go of connecting their religious identification to opposing gender equality.

Conclusion and discussion

Current Western European public debates fueled by right-wing populist sentiments argue that Muslims are hostile to gender equality due to Islam (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Yilmaz, 2015). While some dominant interpretations of Islam might currently be linked to hostility toward gender equality, such narratives simplify the matter and present Islam as one inherently patriarchal religion—views that are not questioned by the majority of quantitative studies, which show that Muslims, on average, support gender equality less than non-Muslims and attribute all differences to the patriarchal effects of Islamic religiosity (e.g., Diehl et al., 2009; Norris and Inglehart, 2012).

Diverging from this approach, this study addressed diversity *among* European Muslims, which allows us to consider that there is no one way to live Islam to which all Muslims adhere (Ginges et al., 2009; Beller et al., 2021; Glas and Spierings, 2021). Instead, we argue that Islamic religiosity is flexible: it consists of multiple dimensions, which, in turn, relate to gender values in different ways through meaning-giving processes that are gendered, subject to change, and dependent on contextual circumstances (Güngör et al., 2013; Phalet et al., 2013; Beek and Fleischmann, 2020; Kogan and Weißmann, 2020). Testing this framework using a pooled dataset that uniquely covers over 9,000 Muslims in 16 European countries between 2008 and 2019 and multilevel analyses, our results show that mosque attendance, religious identification, and individual prayer shape Muslims' support for public-sphere gender equality in far more complex ways than we expected—let alone any right-wing populist claim on one essential patriarchal Islam captures.

At the most general level, we believe that the intricate patterns in our results signify that mosque attendance, religious identification, and individual prayer reflect qualitatively different religiosities, which in turn react differently to gendered and contextual processes. First, mosque attendance is found to limit people's support for public-sphere gender equality, and, unexpectedly, its impact does not differ for men or women (countering Glas et al., 2018; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020), in more and less hostile contexts (in line with Röder and Spierings, 2022), or over time. These results imply that mosques remain patriarchal sites for all (Baker et al., 2013; Röder, 2014; Maliepaard and Alba, 2016; Glas et al., 2019; Nyhagen, 2019; Ghafournia, 2020), which might reflect that mosque-goers do not question the interpretations of religious authorities

or fear rejections from conservative communities if they do. Altogether, the current study finds no support for arguments from qualitative scholars that European Muslims would increasingly question the conservative religious establishment (cf. Predelli, 2004; Duderija, 2007a,b; Kaya, 2010). Although Muslims have become more progressive over time, a more individualized and postmodern European Islam does not manifest itself through a changing relationship between visiting mosque services and support for public-sphere gender equality (cf. Cesari, 2014).

The strength of religious identification and prayer, on the other hand, are not necessarily barriers to Muslims' emancipation (Foner and Alba, 2008), but in different ways, so they do seem to reflect different religiosities (Stark and Glock, 1968; Cornwall et al., 1986). First, it seems that strong identifications capture attachment to the Muslim minority community and its imagined values, but these are viewed differently by men and women. Men might believe that their communities are built on gender complementarity whereas women resist that notion, which would explain why religious identifications only curb men's support for public-sphere gender equality but not women's (countering Kogan and Weißmann, 2020; Glas and Spierings, 2021; in line with Glas et al., 2018; Van Klingeren and Spierings, 2020).

On the other hand, we believe that prayer outside of mosques reflects orthopraxy. Women who pray more often might do so to live up to orthodox interpretations of religious prescriptions (i.e., *salat*) and consequently hold more conservative views on gender relations as well, as our results show. Orthodox Islam however expects men to pray at mosques rather than individually, which explains why we do not find any patriarchal effects of prayer among men (in line with Beller et al., 2021).

This line of reasoning would also explain why the effects of religious identification are weaker in more hostile contexts, whereas those of prayers are stronger, as our results tentatively indicate but we did not expect. The reason is that the imagined values of a community are changeable, but orthodox prescriptions are, by definition, unchangeable. Social identity scholars have argued that this changeability of group positions is pivotal to understanding how communities react to hostilities (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Branscombe et al., 1999; Verkuyten and Reijerse, 2008; see also Geurts and Van Klingeren, 2021; Dickey et al., 2022). If group positions are changeable, groups can change them when faced with hostile attacks. If they are not, groups have to dig in their heels. When met with hostilities, those who strongly identify with the Muslim community seem to re-imagine their community values to fit gender equality. Because orthodoxy leaves no such room for change, frequent prayers can only create positive group identities by doubling down and strengthening their opposition to gender equality. This would explain why our results simultaneously indicate a "digging in their heels" effect for individual prayer and a more egalitarian effect of identification in more hostile contexts.

Another reading of prayer's effects is that hostile environments might cause Muslims to pray less outside of services because they fear social sanctions of hostile non-Muslims. Although we cannot assess this directly, because there are currently no data available on whether prayer was private (non-visible to others) and what individuals believe that the purpose of their prayer is, prayer remains a visible practice. Because identifications are invisible feelings, it makes sense that similar reductions of religious identification's effects are not found in more hostile contexts. Although our results show support for gender equality also declines in more hostile environments, if reductions in prayer are stronger, this would also lead to intensifications in the relation between prayer and opposition to public-sphere gender equality.

Our findings on hostile contexts, however, are not robust. To our knowledge, this study is the first to include three aspects of hostile contexts (hostile public sentiments, populist right-wing parties, and harassing policies), and our results show that they do not all shape the relations between Islamic religiosies and support for public-sphere gender equality in the same way as one another. To start to understand why, future studies could address directly whether Muslims also *perceive* hostilities in all these contexts—directly or through indirect assessments of hostilities at the subnational level, which are more likely to be perceived. If particular hostilities are not perceived—for instance, because interaction with hostile natives is low or because politics are not closely followed—Muslims might not change the ways they live in Islam. Indeed, Röder and Spierings (2022) report that not the public's hostile attitudes but rather Muslims' *perceptions* of group discrimination matter here. Finally, because Western European countries across the board are currently relatively hostile to Muslims (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007; Foner and Alba, 2008; Yilmaz, 2015), differences in their absolute levels of hostility might be too small to be broadly translated to perceptions. Future studies could thus also address whether *changes* in these hostilities, which are more likely to be perceived, shape the ways Muslims live in Islam.

Another open question is how hostile environments shape Islamic religiosity's connection to gender values besides those in the public sphere. Islamic religiosity has been shown to be differently related to support for different gender values (Glas et al., 2019; Glas, 2022b), and the way hostilities shape these relations might consequently also differ. For instance, sexual values might be perceived to be unchangeable, core community values to a greater extent than public-sphere ones, and might be more strongly tied to and less easily decoupled from Islamic religiosity.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the current study has shown that there is no such thing as one essentially patriarchal Islam and simultaneously that Islamic religiosity is not a bridge to emancipation in Western Europe (Foner and Alba, 2008; Glas, 2022b; Röder and Spierings, 2022). The latter oppose findings from studies on Muslim-majority countries, where

some religiosities have been shown to fuel support for public-sphere gender equality (Glas et al., 2018, 2019). At the risk of over-interpretation, this might imply that hostilities do matter from a global perspective, as hostilities toward Muslims in Western Europe are currently so ever-present that they might cause backlashes and close opportunities for Muslim feminism (Glas and Alexander, 2020). Still, even in this context, we do consistently find that some aspects of Islamic religiosity are not barriers to support for public-sphere gender equality among some groups. It deserves more study on what explains this, as it might be a prequel to an Islam that is less hostile to gender equality in Western Europe.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Author contributions

The authors came up with this research idea together. SG wrote the majority of the manuscript. NS conducted the analyses and gave valuable feedback. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.909578/full#supplementary-material

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Pro-life vs. pro-choice in a resurgent nation: The case of post-Soviet Armenia

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A backlash against liberal gender and sexuality attitudes has been an issue in many societies, especially post-Communist. However, it takes a different shape in each socio−cultural context. This article contributes to academic debates about neo-traditionalism in the post-Soviet space and focuses specifically on Armenia. It points at some possible mechanisms that make these societies look more neo-traditionalist than they actually are. From the previous research of gender aspects of nationalism, we argue that the neo-traditionalist public discourses in Armenia might be a by-product of the national identity construction. We conclude that the individual-choice attitudes in the post-Soviet space may reflect the respondents' acceptance of a national ideology promoted by the post-Soviet elites rather than their private practices. Our aim is to reveal the complexities of neo-traditionalism in the post-Soviet space where everyday practices are at odds with neo-traditionalist narratives, which we argue might be a result of the Soviet legacy of unwritten rules and open secrets.

KEYWORDS

nation-building, pro-choice values, European Values Study, neo-traditionalism, post-Soviet countries, open secrets

Introduction

Gender backlash is often presented as a global phenomenon. Indeed, the campaigns against gender equality are run by conservative governments and other actors around the world who mobilize various social groups, resulting in anti-abortion laws in Poland and Hungary and anti-gender movements in the US and Latin America. This is also a prominent trend that is often observed in the post-Soviet space. What such movements have in common is that they all claim to struggle against what they call the "gender ideology." Reproductive rights, along with sex education, same-sex marriage, and the very notion of gender (as opposed to biological sex) are at the center of cross-national debates (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018, p. 8). However, it is important to consider the local particularities in each case of gender backlash.

Post-Soviet gender issues in the past decades are often characterized by such terms as "conservative turn," "re-familiarization," or "maternalism" (Mahon and Williams, 2007). The regional specifics vary from the religion-charged national revivals in Central Asia (Kandiyoti, 2007) to the rise of masculinity in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (Johnson and Saarinen, 2013; Riabov and Riabova, 2014; Bureychak and Petrenko, 2015). World

Values Survey and the European Values Study data collected in post-Soviet countries show that those states, with a notable exception of Baltic countries, demonstrate less gender egalitarianism than any other society of comparable wealth and educational level (Inglehart and Norris, 2003), and less progress in the recent decades than expected.

Armenia may be considered a model case of the gender backlash in the post-Soviet space, as it exemplifies the deep contradictions observed in the region. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Armenia has become a part and parcel of the anti-gender trend observed in the post-Soviet region:

> *"Armenia underwent a resurgence of neo-traditionalism and patriarchal patterns of behavior in the wake of the USSR's collapse. Gender equality and the inclusion of women in the public sphere were rejected as artificial Soviet impositions, and many nationalists, political conservatives, and members of the clergy described women's equality as being antithetical to Armenian values"* (Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan, 2019, p. 730).

In the 1990s, the country experienced an immense economic crisis aggravated by warfare. The first Nagorno–Karabakh war began in 1988 and ended victoriously for Armenia in 1994. Border clashes have been on and off since then and until the second war in 2021, which ended with a victory for Azerbaijan. On top of that, the history of Armenia is full of tragic episodes that culminated in the 1915 Ottoman genocide that resulted in 1.5 million deaths, ethnic cleansing, and massive emigration. Armenians make one of the largest diasporas of around 4.5 million of full or partial Armenian ancestry compared to the current population of approximately 3 million people in Armenia proper (Cohen, 2008, p. 52). Its current territory is a fraction of historical Armenia, surrounded by two explicitly inimical states (Azerbaijan, and, to somewhat lesser extent, Turkey) with regular paroxysms of warfare at its borders, especially in the contested land of Nagorno–Karabakh. No wonder that nationalist sentiment and national pride are quite strong in Armenia. This is the backdrop of the rise of anti-gender attitudes and policies in the last three decades. The endangered project of nation-building has been used by the Armenian politicians since 1991 to reinforce the national identity, and such a stance is closely associated with pro-life discourse worldwide (Gal, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Smyth, 1998). In Armenia, this discourse is, indeed, very popular among both the politicians and the general public.

At the same time, seven decades of Soviet secularization and the policy of women's empowerment have left a deep imprint on Armenian society. Armenia is a case of relatively successful and rapid Soviet-style modernization in the twentieth century, which resulted in low fertility rates, high rate of female college attendance, urbanization, and cross-regional mobility. Formal parameters, such as total fertility rate, mother's age

at first birth, divorce rates have not changed much in the post-Soviet period and are similar to those of modernized countries. Armenian women are active in the non-governmental sector and participate in political protest, democracy building and civil society initiatives (Ishkanian, 2005; Ziemer, 2020). The democratic forces in Armenia are vibrant such as multiple NGOs and civil society institutes, LGBT-and women-rights movements.

For this reason, we argue that the story of gender attitudes in Armenia is much more complicated than a simple return to the "Golden Age" of traditionalism after a failed Soviet modernization project. It rather looks like a number of trials in a quest for "creating new imaginaries of the nation that enhance social solidarity in increasingly fractured post-Soviet societies" (Kandiyoti, 2007). Eisenstadt notes that the conservative turn is in fact deeply modern even though it may wear a mask of traditionalism (Eisenstadt, 2000). In his book, "*Multiple Modernities*," he posits that after the dissolution of large empires such as the Soviet Union, the emerging states shape their identities based on their ethnic or religious unity. It is a common way for post-imperial societies to constitute their nationhood by disavowing the empire's values and reverting to traditionalism in family life and public discourse. This is especially so when the new nation feels an existential threat or has a history of such a threat. Women and their rights to divorce, abortion, and premarital or extramarital sex are particularly vulnerable to the patriarchal discourse and policies in such a situation. However, what happens if those women are secularized and educated, familiar with contraception, and have had low birth rates for generations?

This article aims to take a closer look at and critically assess the gender backlash in Armenia. Our main argument is that Armenia is not as conservative as it may look. We intend to show and explain the many complexities of what is perceived as gender backlash in Armenia. We focus on freedom in sexual and reproductive choices, operationalized as justification of abortion, divorce, and casual sex. To illustrate our argument, we employ regression and latent class analyses of two waves of the EVS survey (EVS, 2020) to show that the national pride operationalized in various ways is the main (and almost the only) predictor of conservative attitudes. In the following sections, we will give more context on Armenia as a part of the Soviet project of emancipation, its post-Soviet transformations, and endangered nation-building, continue with data analysis, and proceed with discussion and conclusion.

Armenia as a post-Soviet society

A possible explanation of the anti-gender backlash is the Armenian government's distancing from the Soviet-era policies, which is typical for many nations that emerged after the collapse of the USSR. The dissatisfaction of women and men with Soviet

gender policies existed already in the Soviet Union period but it became more acute and visible after the Soviet Union's collapse. This discontent evolved into support of more traditional gender roles in the context of national revival.

Armenia as a part of the Soviet Union was subject to Soviet gender policies. In the early twentieth century, the Soviet Union was one of the more progressive countries with respect to gender equality and sexual freedom. It implemented universal voting rights, mass education, and state programs of enhancing female labor force participation right after the 1917 revolution.

Historically, the Independent Republic of Armenia (1918–1920) granted women a right to vote and to be elected; 8% members of the parliament were women (Talalyan, 2020, p. 14). After the establishment of the Soviet power in Armenia in 1920, rape was criminalized and bride purchase was prohibited. Girls of less than 16 years of age were forbidden to marry. Women and men got equal rights to inheritance.

Thanks to the effort of the prominent Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai in the early post-revolutionary years, Soviet women could make free decisions about marriage (or refrain from it), divorce, abortion, and premarital sex. Based on her approach, the Soviet Union managed to drastically change the peasantry's patriarchal norms in a couple of decades (Kollontai, 1977). The number of births started to decline even before the revolution, but the process had been slower than in other European countries until the Bolshevik reform accelerated it (Ashwin, 2000). Even when, due to Stalin's demographic concerns, abortion was illegal in the USSR (1936–1955); it was still performed secretly *en masse*. Most Soviet women of those generations reported to have experienced abortion at least once in their life. Many perceived it as simply a means of contraception (Westoff, 2005), which is reflected in astounding statistics; for example, 5.5 million legal abortions were performed in USSR in 1965, that is more than live births (Johnston, 2021). In the early 1970s, the abortion rate in Armenia stood at 45% of all pregnancies which is somewhat lower than in the USSR in general, but still extremely high (Johnston, 2021).

Regarding divorce, it had been available with a "no reason" explanation since 1918, while co-habitations were equalized with marriages in 1926. Divorce became somewhat less easy to obtain in 1936, as it then involved a fine and the necessary presence of both parties. It was made a public issue in 1944, as the parties had to publish a note about their divorce in local newspapers (Fitzpatrick, 2000). The divorce rate was relatively low right after World War II, but it had grown 10-fold by the mid-1970s, because of post-Stalin policy liberalization of the 1950s.

Despite some positive changes that the Soviet domination brought up to the Caucasus region, including the policies that allowed women more autonomy and choice in reproductive and sexual behaviors, inequality continued to flourish. In Soviet Armenia, men dominated the upper levels of government and the Communist Party and had better paying jobs to the extent that men's salaries were up to 5 times higher than those of

women (Dudwick, 1997, p. 238–239; Ishkanian, 2005, p. 482). Furthermore, women carried a double burden as they had to work full time while being fully responsible for home chores and raising children.

Some resistance to radical change and in favor of the preservation of traditions in Armenia persisted throughout the Soviet period. In addition, the patriarchal gender roles were staunchly upheld within Armenian families, and were seen by many as a form of everyday resistance to Soviet social engineering (Matossian, 1962).

"Open secrets" as a Soviet legacy

An important feature that distinguishes post-Soviet societies is the legacy of Soviet informal practices and "open secrets." The Soviet Union was a testing ground for various, often radical, social experiments. Its population experienced a broad variety of government interventions in their economic, religious, social, and sexual life. Moreover, those experiments sometimes made complete U-turns that negated the earlier official line, yet they were always accompanied by intensive propaganda. Therefore, not only did they deprive the majority of the Soviet population of their family traditions and religious roots, but of any ideological embeddedness whatsoever (Inkeles and Bauer, 2013). The policy zigzags eventually led to distrust of official proclamations and to mass escape into one's private life. When the state's prestige was relatively high, the dominant ideology was enthusiastically shared by the majority; on the contrary, during the regime's economic and moral decline, most people were very cynical about it.

Absent Stalin, the only carrier of the "objective truth," the Soviet public life transformed so that the reproduction of the form and of the ritual became more important than the actual contents of public speech. In his ground-breaking study, Alexey Yurchak argues that after Stalin's death, the system experienced the standardization of official discourse, ubiquitous posters, and slogans were "common, identical, predictable," the texts became "normalized, fixed, and citational (Yurchak, 2013, p. 37)." The support for the system was simulated in many intricate ways; a performative shift developed in the wake of Stalin's death (Yurchak, 2013). Participation in rituals was an indication of one's belonging to a collective. The performative aspect of public speech and rituals not only reproduced social and power structures but also carried a liberating function for their performers; as their loyalty was thus officially confirmed, the performers had more freedom for self-expression in other contexts. This enabled new unanticipated meanings in everyday life and created new forms of "freedom' (Yurchak, 2013, p. 37).

The prevalence of the following unwritten rules and informal practices in the relationship of citizens and authorities kept the system functioning: the planned economy could not function without people getting around its declared principles and depended on people who compensated systemic deficiencies

by cutting corners and easing the constraints (Ledeneva, 2011, p. 726). One aspect of the unwritten rules is open secrets; according to Ledeneva, open secrets refer to the set of informal practices that are well-known but absent from the official discourse (Ibid.). They indicate a gap between the official discourse and the everyday practices. Open secrets require not only the common in-group knowledge of unwritten rules but also the ability to handle them, or tacit knowledge; the group's outsiders cannot know the secret. The open secret should remain unarticulated, "Open secrets occupy areas of tension, where a public affirmation of knowledge would threaten other values or goods that those involved want to protect" (Ledeneva, 2011, p. 725). The concept of open secrets can be understood as a conflict of interest between individuals and groups, as opposition to dominant social norms; they are relevant in social systems with contradictory nature. It is not a hypocrisy but a way for an individual to remain within the social order and at the same time oppose it, or allow some degree of emancipation from the system (Rossier, 2007).

The phenomenon exists in other societies, too; for instance, abortion is an open secret in Burkina Faso, where abortion is illegal in most cases (Rossier, 2007). This study shows that while women generally choose to keep their abortion secret, they nevertheless discuss it with their friends and relatives; thus, many people are actually aware of it.

The practices that are in the focus of our research—abortion, divorces, and premarital sex—are widely stigmatized and therefore not articulated in the official discourse in Armenia. The Soviet hypocrisy with respect to freedom in sexual and reproductive choices (Zdravomyslova, 2001) was also a characteristic of Armenia that talking about sex and sexuality, especially with women, was inappropriate. Although sex education was introduced in Armenia in 2004, sex and sexuality are still a controversial topic and often censored, especially for girls. This aspect has changed little since the Soviet times (Talalyan, 2020, p. 43).

At the same time, many indicators in Armenia show that the actual practice does not correspond to the discourse: abortion and divorce rates are high, hymenoplasty (plastic surgery for the hymen restoration) is popular, the mean age at marriage is steadily rising, and the mean number of children is steadily declining (Darbinyan et al., 2019). Although polls show that the overwhelming majority opposes freedom in sexual and reproductive choices, statistics show that abortion is widely practiced, whereas divorce and age at marriage are very close to the European levels. This discrepancy is the puzzle that drives this research. We believe it can partly be attributed to the Soviet habit of open secrets that the respondents tell outsiders (including researchers) the officially approved opinion regarding abortions, divorces, and premarital sex while reserving personal freedom for private conversations and actions. Just as in Yurchak's model of late Soviet society, we see a similar dynamic in post-Soviet Armenia that the reproduction of the

official discourse opens possibilities for more freedom of action and new unanticipated meanings. Even if this is true, the question remains, why is the official (and public) narrative on pro-choice attitudes so harsh in Armenia?

The collapse of the Soviet Union made the ideological vacuum even more acute. Even those older people who used to honestly believe in the communist ideals faced the breakdown of the state they fought and worked for (Alexievich, 2016). People started contemplating alternative ideologies even before the Soviet collapse; liberal democracy seemed very promising for many. However, the first tough years after the collapse of the USSR resulted in frustration and disappointment in liberal democracy across the emerging post-Soviet societies. In most cases, the various conservative ideologies filled the ideological vacuum in post-Soviet countries. Typically, it was a nationalist ideology, whether in a primordial or state-oriented mode, flavored with a varying quantity of traditional religion. The position of women in those societies was explicitly reformulated in all cases. The new official discourses were about bringing women back home from the labor market. However, it did not necessarily mean that women actually followed remonstrances of the politicians and conservative activists. Neither the average number of children has risen nor the divorce rate has fallen dramatically. All the existing demographic trends suggest irrelevance of conservative political interventions in this sphere (Vishnevsky, 2009).

The new realities—neoliberalism in the forms of oligarchic capitalism—also felt like another experiment and reinforced distrust in the government because of the shrinking public services and monopolization of goods and services by local tycoons. The post-Communist governments were "most fervent and committed adopters of neoliberal economic reforms" (Appel and Orenstein, 2018); they continued to enact neoliberal reforms despite political setbacks. In Armenia, similar to many post-Soviet countries, the political and economic power has been in the hands of the ruling elite that the state and private media have been predominantly owned by the oligarchs, the opposition have not had much resources to compete at the elections, many Armenian oligarchs have been members of parliaments and members of the ruling Republican party. Oligarchs used their wealth and resources to ensure the victory of their candidates in elections (e.g., victories of Sargsian and Kocharian) (Stefes, 2008; Aghajanian, 2012). This situation led to lower institutional trust in the long run.

Armenian nation-building and pro-choice attitudes

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia along with other post-Soviet governments tended to promote gender hierarchy and traditional gender roles to reinforce their legitimacy. As some authors note, the role of mother quickly

started to be praised as sacred, as Armenian mothers were called upon to revive the nation after centuries of colonization and abuse. During the times of crisis, women were involved in the nationalist movement in the late 1980s and Karabakh war in the 1990s; they fought in the war and assisted the war effort in multiple ways (Shahnazarian, 2016). Beukian shows that in the aftermath of the nationalist movement of 1988 and the war in Karabakh, "the role of women shifted from protestors, soldiers, and martyrs, to home-carers, housewives, and mothers" (Beukian, 2014, p. 248) However, the sacralization of women puts them in a passive role as reproducers of the country, transmitters of culture to the younger generation, guardians of the nation's health (Beukian, 2014, p. 253). Their agency and active participation in democratic movements for independence and in the war have been largely ignored by the national ideology and public discourse (Shahnazarian, 2016).

Gendered national ideology aiming at securing and legitimizing male domination has become a part of national ideology and nation-building across post-Soviet space (except the Baltic countries). This is a part and parcel of breaking away from the Soviet past and asserting the country's continuity with the pre-Soviet period. In addition to emphasizing the idea of soil and blood, these discourses are also strong on women's role as mothers and the nation's means of reproduction. These discourses typically emphasize the control over women's reproductive function and their sexuality through public condemnation of "deviance." These developments resemble legal prohibitions of divorces, abortions, and premarital sex in other countries, which also involved the patriarchal notions of "manhood" and "womanhood" (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

In the Republic of Armenia since 1991, women's presence in governmental structures has remained low despite the gender quotas and formal legal equality. After the Velvet revolution of 2018 where women took an active part in the protest, the new government of Nikol Pashinyan did not increase the representation of women. The National Assembly of Armenia returned to the quota system in 1999, adopting a law providing for mandatory inclusion of women in the party lists—no less than 5% (in 2007, the quota increased to 15%, and in 2012 to 20%). A very few women run and get elected to regional and local governments, where specific quotas do not exist. Female mayors or governors of regions are non-existent, and there are only a small number of women working as heads of village administration. According the UNDP report, women make up only 9% of the district and local councils. Moreover, the gender stereotypes continue to deny women positions of leadership (Cavoukian and Shahnazaryan, 2019). However, their presence in NGOs and horizontal networks is high.

Despite all the differences that post-Soviet societies may have, the processes of nation-building in those societies have common features as follows: They are relatively conservative, stressing patriarchal and nationalist narratives, and trying to form their new national post-Soviet identity by appealing to primordial discourses and myths of national revival (Gapova, 2007). Even the Perestroika leader, Mikhail Gorbachev claimed that women should be liberated from their double burden and stay at home (Rotkirch et al., 2007).

After the fall of communism, "women's interests were sacrificed to the transformation" in the former Soviet Union and all over post-Communist Europe (Funk and Mueller, 2018). This resulted in transition from the full employment system to returning women to the private sphere of home, control over women's bodies and general hostility toward women's sexuality, realized through restrictions of abortions and the emphasis on women's roles as mothers (Funk and Mueller, 2018). Gender and sexuality are now acknowledged as a major basis for redistribution of resources within each nation, benefiting some groups at the expense of others. Furthermore, the observed drastic reduction of gender equality and rejection of individual-choice values might occur due to the recovery of class hierarchies in these societies. As Gapova argues, "while the essential feature of the third wave of feminism in the West was the alleviation of the class structure, which meant a more even redistribution of resources, post-socialism generated the amplification of the class structure through economic inequality" (Gapova, 2005). According to her analysis, the redistribution of resources went hand in hand with redefinitions of masculinity and femininity and the roles of men and women in the society (Gapova, 2002). A rapid economic decline may lead to unpredictable transformations in gender patterns, either to more egalitarian or more oppressive gender order (Young, 2013).

Religion is instrumental in building the new gender order, and its role in Armenia is huge. Religion is prominent in the public sphere of most post-Soviet states, serving as a "grand narrative representing national values" (Agadjanian, 2006). The Armenian church (one of the earliest Christian churches) plays an important role in everyday life of people and in the persistence of the traditional gender roles in Armenia.

The most specific feature of the Armenian gender order is the attitude toward pre-marital sex and public fetishization of virginity. Attitudes toward sexuality remain discriminatory toward women that a 2016 survey revealed that almost 86% of respondents agreed that women should remain virgin until marriage (Arab and Abrahamyan, 2019). This fact usually has to be proven by the mother-in-law, and remains an issue in the marital choice. Temkina shows that social control of premarital sex constitutes the gender order in Armenia (Temkina, 2010, p. 132).

Talalyan argues that the institute of marriage is the pinnacle of patriarchy in Armenia, which shapes power relations in the domestic sphere, maintaining marginalization and inequality of women in the domestic sphere. Women can face insecurity and economic instability outside marriage, especially in the case of divorce (Talalyan, 2020, p. 2).

"To obey the husband is one of the most important obligations of an Armenian woman, and the Armenian husband has all rights to demand this kind of submission from her. This statement proves not only national written materials, but also religious records" (Talalyan, 2020, p. 9). A cheating husband is tolerated by the society whereas a cheating wife would be harshly criticized as not worthy of being called an Armenian woman (Aharonian, 2010). Strict regulations of young women's behavior and limitations on their freedom has been a custom in Armenian society historically. Purity and humility have been the main sources of pride of the bride's family and deviations from strict rules of girls' upbringing could lead to social stigma.

Despite women's access to education and employment since the nineteenth century (Rowe, 2003), the patriarchal paradigm is remarkably stable in private life. Despite the fact that abortion, divorce, single motherhood, remarriage used to be available options in the twentieth century Armenia, the gender-age hierarchies remain powerful. Men are considered the bread-winners in the family while women's main role is to be a mother–housewife. The parents often choose partners for their children. These tendencies are especially prominent in the rural and urban areas while significant diversity is observed in Yerevan (Talalyan, 2020, p. 43).

The institute of the traditional Armenian family is still strong in Armenian society. Even in the Soviet period, Armenian men and women found it crucially important to keep their marriage in any circumstances as divorce was universally condemned and had harsher consequences for women Talalyan. While it may seem typical for any modernizing society, Armenian scholars claim that marital status played an exceptional role for Armenian women throughout decades, while divorced women were stigmatized. The lack of gender equality, especially in the private sphere, and stigmatization of divorced women resulted in domestic violence. There is no punishment for domestic violence in the Armenian criminal code (Martirosyan, 2019). Violence against women is widely accepted and can be even seen as a norm inside the family, "Armenia is a patriarchal society, in which gender-based stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes are passed on from generation to generation" (Nikoghosyan, 2015, p. 23).

There are sex-selective abortions as well a considerable intolerance in Armenian public and media toward women- and LGBT-rights activists and organizations (Nikoghosyan, 2015). The rate of newborn boys to girls in Armenia is among the most inequal in the world, and it has to do with the lower status of women in general as well as to economic reasons (girls leave parents' house when they get married). In 2013, the adoption of the law on Equal Right and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women by the parliament instigated a public hysteria and actions by ultra-nationalist groups against the law, women- and LGBT-rights activists, and the very word gender (Nikoghosyan, 2015, p. 23) Nikoghosyan views it as a broader attack on women and LGBT rights activists in the region and civil society on post-Soviet space that aim to block any attempts

toward European integration. The adoption of the law mobilized an anti-gender movement and resulted in the changes of the title of the law (Hovhannisyan, 2018). The interpretation of the law and its leading concept—gender—has been interpreted by the conservatives as propaganda of homosexuality; the 2013 law was represented by far-right nationalists as a threat to the already endangered nation. Gender, according to far-right nationalists, threatens the existence of Armenian nation because it is seen as attempts to "halt Armenians from reproducing for their future survival as a nation" (Shirinian, 2019, p. 964). Marriage, family, and reproduction of national values are deemed to be the important factors that ensure survival of their nation that the reaction against the law came from almost all segments of the society (Shirinian, 2019). Human rights and equality are often perceived as "Western" values and even "foreign intervention" (Shirinian, 2019). The word gender, as a result, was deleted from all documents.

There have been two waves in the process of gender backlash and re-traditionalization in Armenia; the first was internal (1988–1991) and caused by the economic collapse and political instability. The second one was external, when Armenia became a member of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2013 led by Russia. The construction of the imaginary "illiberal East" in the country has to do not only with the historical and nation-building features but also with the elites' desire to ally with Russia, whose elites also exhibit ostentatious patriarchy and traditionalism. The Kremlin's domestic and international narratives amplify the ideological confrontation with the West; it denounces "Gayrope" (meaning Europe) in an attempt to discredit the European Union as a model and convince the public to support the Eurasian Economic Union. Sperling (2014) argues that the gender norms propagating gender stereotypes, patriarchal culture, and "macho" masculinity are used as a legitimation tool by the Russian government. Moreover, Russia exports this ideology abroad to win conservatives' support in various societies. A very nuanced recent work of Shirinian (2020) argues that imaginary geography where the US is portrayed as an enemy to Armenia influences the perception of the term "gender." The ideology of "illiberal East" is actively supported by various far-right and nationalist groups in Armenia, politicians, and media. The term gender, as Nona Shahnazarian argues, is a "battleground in efforts for producing new geopolitical divisions" (Shahnazarian, 2017). After Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union, anti-gender campaigns became stronger, while women- and LGBT-rights almost disappeared from the public discourse (Shahnazarian, 2017).

Armenian historical traumas and perceived threat to national existence

In Armenia, the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno–Karabakh exacerbates the traumatic memories of the 1915 Armenian genocide. Armenia is the center of a very divided

community of over 7 million Armenians living in diaspora (spyurk) and 4–5 million of crypto-Armenians (those who are hiding their ethnic roots in contemporary Turkey) (Cheterian, 2015). Post-Soviet Armenia is surrounded by hostile states and many people in the country feel as if they were in a besieged fortress. For those who left Armenia, it is often imagined as a lost paradise. As Nira Yuval–Davis notes, "[The new communication technologies established] the new role for the 'homeland' more central and concrete, for diasporic communities, whose links with their country of origin had for many generations a symbolical meaning" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 66). This is very true for Armenians, as national pride and corresponding pro-natalist attitudes can be associated with the national struggle for the territories, and the national identity is built on the basis of tragic common history of genocide and dispersion.

Another trauma of Armenian society has to do with its colonial experience. As Fanon (1952) had argued, liberation from the (effeminizing) colonial burden is often associated with reclaiming the colonized men' masculinity and the associated disempowerment of women. However, the recently achieved freedom from the Soviet colonial project does not exhaust the topic.

When a national project is perceived to be threatened and the construction of the national identity is contested, the attitudes toward sexuality and gender might take extreme and prohibiting forms. The nationalists often rely on discourses of home and family to prop up the national identity in times of crisis (Moghadam, 1994). The rhetoric of national threat of losing the local population worked so well that virtually all the USSR successor states exploited it although to a various extent (Marsh, 1998; Cleuziou and Direnberger, 2016). The elites framed the debates on individual-choice values so that being against those values was natural for a "patriot." This choice of the post-Soviet elites is perhaps better explained by their economic incapacity to build a new national identity on another basis than by cultural factors (Suny, 2000; Surucu, 2002). Nation-building projects try to "mobilize all available relevant resources for their promotion" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 44). When economic resources are scarce, and the political ones unstable, the political entrepreneurs resort to culture. Here the issues of fertility, birth control, and family easily become central as women are "required to carry this 'burden of representation', as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honor" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 45). Hence, the symbolic importance of female purity, as only "pure" women can reproduce a "pure" nation to sustain and ensure its survival (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989).

At any rate, people's attitudes are affected by various nationalist and neo-traditionalist ideologies. Yet their behaviors, especially in the private sphere, remain divorced from the official line. The wide-spread condemnation of these practices in survey answers does not necessarily reflect the reality where abortions, divorces, and premarital sex have been normalized since the

early Soviet period. Despite the significant decline in abortions and increasing use of contraception since 1991, the former still remains an important part of country's reproductive culture and practice.

While research on value change points to the behavioral relevance of individual-choice values (Welzel, 2013, p. 189), as values usually affect life strategies and priorities, we see an opposite pattern in Armenia. The discrepancy between the individual-choice values and actual behaviors in Armenia may be due to socioeconomic reasons. Many decisions related to sexual and reproductive choices are conditioned by socioeconomic factors to a greater extent than by values. Low levels of fertility during the first two decades after the Soviet collapse might happen to a larger extent due to economic restraints rather than value change. If both partners are jobless, they are more likely to postpone their next child. According to Billingsley (2011), the wealthiest women in Armenia have higher odds of wanting a third child. The choice of divorce vs. keeping the marriage may also be viewed as a decision driven by economic considerations rather than individual choice. Women's status and economic security might be affected as a result of divorce (Talalyan, 2020, p. 60).

A representative study indicated that the Armenian public views men's migration more positively than women's (Agadjanian, 2020). In patriarchal societies like Armenia, women's migration is still a subject of stigmatization. Since Armenia gained independence in 1991, the collapse of its economy and deindustrialization increased the labor migration flow, including the labor migration of women and permanent emigration. The male migration flows continued to grow and decimated communities in rural areas. The stabilization of the economy in the late 1990s did not restore the rural employment rates because the Soviet-era rural industries did not really recover. Due to the economic stagnation in the rural areas, the rural poverty remained widespread, pushing more men to migrate to Russia (Menjívar and Agadjanian, 2007). Female labor migration from Armenia has been relatively low. The patriarchal norms supported the gender imbalance in labor migration. When their partner migrates, women take additional responsibilities in the household but this does not transform women's status and relationships (Agadjanian, 2020). Women have been increasingly becoming breadwinners in the families yet men are still considered the "heads of the household" (Anjargolian, 2005, p. 182). After the Soviet collapse, many educated women, such as engineers or teachers, had to work as street vendors or cleaners. According to Aslanyan, many women surveyed in 2005 agreed that they would prefer to sit at home if the husband could provide for the family (Aslanyan, 2005, p. 200).

The decline in birth rates might be the result of economic conditions rather than changing the individual values. Our research question, however, is not why people do what they do but rather why they say some things

publicly while doing very different things privately. This article focuses on the possible mechanisms that make these discrepancies possible.

Hypotheses

Our data allow us to take a glimpse on individual-choice attitudes in Armenia. In more than 30 years of independence, new generations grew up listening to the discourses on women amalgamating patriarchal and nationalist ideologies. How successful have these discourses been? Which social groups are more prone to support these discourses?

We analyze measures of attitudes toward abortions, divorces, and casual sex. These items are not necessarily something that respondents think of on a daily basis. Yet they reflect socially approved opinions formed mostly in the post-Soviet period. The respondents' answers give us an idea of what can and what cannot be said publicly—in other words, of social norms. As Moore and Vanneman wrote, "most people conceal their real attitudes toward any charged issues. For this reason, the overwhelming support of puritanic attitudes in mass surveys may not reflect the actual practice, although it does reflect the social norm" (Moore and Vanneman, 2003).

The majority of people, whose answers we are analyzing below, grew up in the USSR, and they could hardly have radically changed their opinion after the dissolution of the country. However, the new institutional context empowered some, and disempowered others. Social context defines the majority opinion, but there is some degree of heterogeneity and a few agents of change in every society. In more open and less-repressive systems, this heterogeneity is more vivid than in others. In more restrictive situations, some potential agents of change are more likely to leave the country, making these prospective changes less probable.

At any rate, people's attitudes are affected by official post-Soviet discourses, oftentimes essentially nationalist. However, their behavior, especially in the private sphere, remains disassociated from the official line, which continues the tradition of Soviet "open secrets." Still, we expect those people who are more affected with nationalist ideologies to express more conservative attitudes. Consequently, we state the basic hypothesis of this study as follows: Nationalism is a strong predictor of individual-choice values, operationalized as attitudes toward abortion, divorce, and casual sex.

Additional hypotheses are of twofold. The first has to do with *institutional trust* as lack thereof along with repression (even in the form of opprobrium) creates an environment conducive to open secrets and unwritten rules. We expect that those with lower levels of confidence in state institutions will be more likely to express the most conservative attitudes. The second is about *interest in politics,* as we think that those affected by the official discourse will be more supportive of the patriarchal narrative formulated by the state.

In most societies in the world, the support of individual-choice values is well predicted with higher education, younger age, low levels of religiosity, and higher social status with high explanatory power of those predictors. We expect all those factors to have weaker explanatory power in Armenia.

Analysis

Post-Soviet countries significantly deviate from the theoretical prediction of their position on abortion, divorce, and casual sex. These attitudes, labeled "individual choice" in Welzel's emancipative index, are expected to rank much higher than we find in the post-Soviet societies for which we have compatible data (Welzel, 2013).

We use two waves of the European Values Study that include Armenia with fieldwork done in 2008 (EVS, 2020, 4th wave), and 2018 (EVS, 2020, 5th wave) to investigate the factors of pro-choice attitudes.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable in our analysis is an index of individual-choice values that resembles Welzel's index of individual choice (Welzel, 2013). Our index, too, includes questions regarding the justification of divorce and abortion, but we exclude the question on homosexuality because it has little or no variation. The overwhelming majority of the Armenian respondents (95%) say that it can never be justified. Due to the long history of criminal punishment for sex between males (up to 1993) and a history of using homosexual sex as a measure of control in Soviet prisons (and millions of Soviet men have been a part of that system on either side of the bars), homosexuality is still deeply stigmatized in the whole post-Soviet region (Clech, 2018; Gulevich et al., 2018).

To replace the missing item of the index, we add a question on casual (extramarital) sex. The issue of virginity is still very much alive in many patriarchal cultures and it has received some attention in the post-Soviet context in the recent years (Poghosyan, 2011). As Anna Temkina writes in her work on the Armenian case, premarital virginity was the key part of gender order there even in the relatively emancipated Soviet period (even though emancipation might apply more to the public, rather than private, domain) (Temkina, 2010, p. 132). The question on justification of extramarital sex also relates to individual choice in one's private life and correlates with the two other components of the index.

Consequently, our index includes the following variables: Justification of divorce, abortion, and casual sex. All answers are measured on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "can never be justified" and 10 means "can always be justified."

Controls and independent variables

Education is dichotomized so that it has the following two levels: University education (level 1) and other (level 2). Age and gender are taken from the original EVS data set "as is."

We use two measures of religiosity as follows: Attendance is a seven-level variable (ranging from "Several times a day" to "Never"), treated as a continuous variable. Although we acknowledge the issue of distance inequality between categories, the preliminary analysis shows an almost constant effect across categories, so we decided in favor of the model parsimony. The other one is the response to the question whether the respondent is religious with the following three categories of answers: "A religious person," "Not a religious person," and "A convinced atheist."

Interest in politics is a four-point variable (1: very interested, 4: not at all interested) that we treat as a continuous variable.

We measure nationalism, which is our main explanatory variable as a response to the question, "How proud are you to be a national of your country" with four possible answers: "very proud," "proud," "not proud," and "not at all proud." We united the two latter categories into one as they are numerically small.

Another block of independent variables includes a battery of questions on confidence in state or international organizations coded as follows: 1: a great deal of confidence, 4: no confidence at all.

Methods

The datasets of the last two waves of the European Values Study demonstrate very high quality, and the problem of missing values is relatively small. Nevertheless, we start with multiple imputation [using the Amelia package in the R environment (Honaker et al., 2011; R Core Team, 2020)] to rely on full datasets and to make sure that missing values do not alter our results. Amelia is a tool (library) for the R environment for statistical programming that runs multiple imputation—it reconstructs missing values based upon variable relationships within the dataset. Then we proceed to latent class analysis, which identifies two groups of respondents. The first tends to answer "Never justifiable" to all the questions on justifiability of abortion, divorce, and casual sex included in our index. The other group (forming just less than half of the sample) is less radical.

Based on this finding, we conduct a two-step regression analysis with binary logistic regression at the first step and gamma regression at the second step (cf. Gelman and Hill, 2006). At the first step, we re-code our dependent variable into two categories: "1" refers to those people who say they could never justify divorce, abortion, and sex before marriage, and "0" stands for those who justify at least some individual choice on at least

one dimension. We then use logistic regression to analyze the factors that distinguish these two categories of respondents.

At the second step, we conduct a regression analysis that distinguishes between those individuals who accept individual choice to various degrees, excluding those coded as "1" at the previous step. This analysis helps us identify the factors that influence one's views on family and sexual behavior, provided one does not hold radically conservative beliefs. We employed gamma regression at the second step of our analysis due to the shape of the distribution of our DV. In these models, we estimate the effects of various factors on individual-choice values among those who concede that it is possible to sometimes justify, at least minimally, abortion, divorce or casual sex. We also cross-check our findings using Tobit regression; these results are given in Appendix.

Results

Latent class analysis

One can see two major groups differing in the degree of their radicalism on the issues of interest in Figures 1, 2. The class of "never justifiers" remains stable over time (about 53%). Another class of "sometimes justifiers" shows some dynamics, as the attitude toward casual sex is the strictest of all three variables, but less so in the latter wave.

Binary logistic regressions

At the first step, we employ logistic regression to estimate the predictors of radically conservative attitudes (those people who answer "never justifiable" on all three questions included into the index) (see Table 1).

Interestingly, the controls that routinely prove to be significant, such as higher education or gender show no effect. Younger age has a fair predictive power in wave 4, but much less so in wave 5. Overall, the model fitted for the earlier data fits our theoretical expectations much better both in terms of significant predictors and their explanatory power.

In EVS (2020), we see strong effects of religiosity and political interest; more religious people and those not interested in politics are more likely to never justify abortions, divorces, and casual sex, the latter finding being contrary to our expectations. Less confidence in the national civil service and healthcare system, but more confidence in the justice system (in wave 4) and education system (in wave 5) is associated with strict moral condemnation.

However, the only predictor that shows high significance in both waves of EVS is national pride; those who are very proud to be Armenians (as opposed to those "quite proud" and "not very proud") tend to have more condemning attitudes.
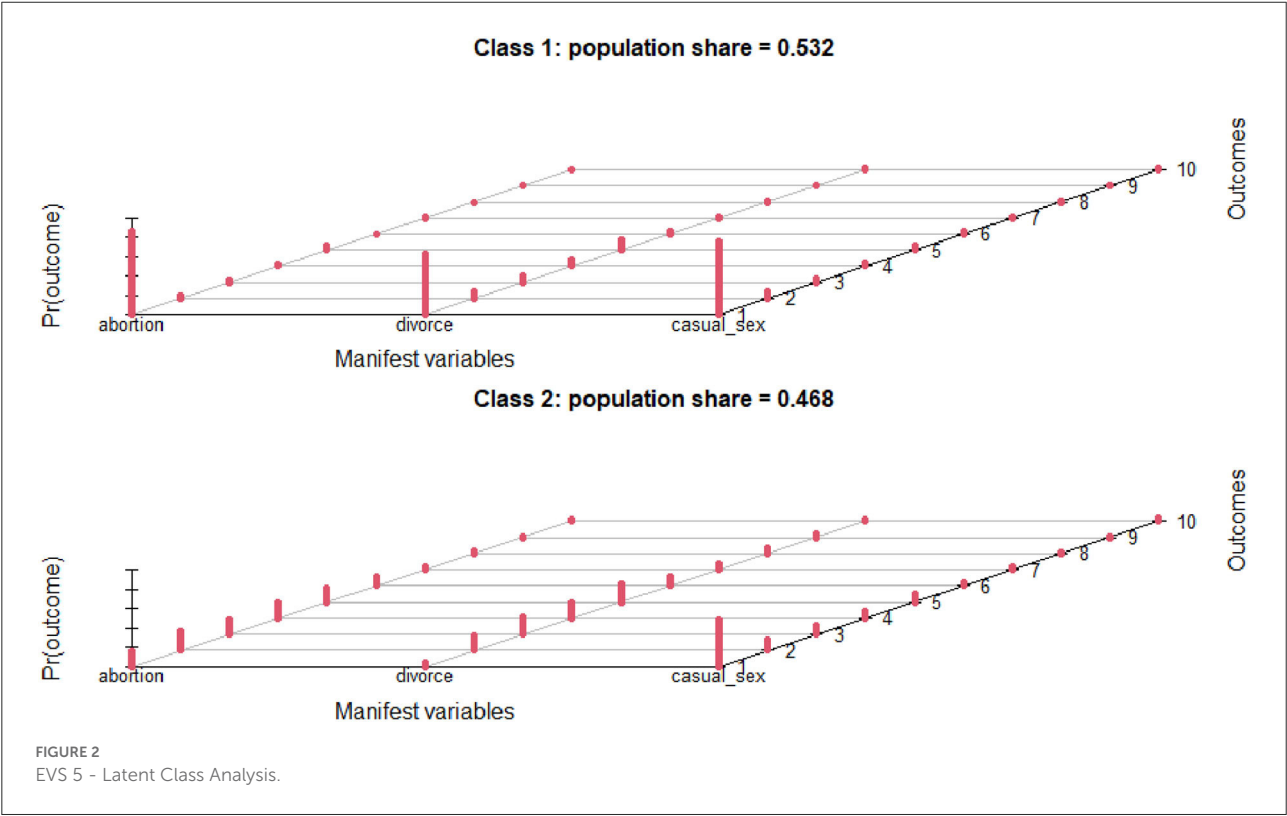
FIGURE 1
EVS 4 – Latent Class Analysis.

FIGURE 2
EVS 5 – Latent Class Analysis.

TABLE 1 Binary logistic regressions on most conservative attitudes (1-all three components never justifiable).

	EVS4	EVS5
Education (Higher)	−0.077 (0.136)	−0.199 (0.134)
Gender (female)	−0.169 (0.122)	0.034 (0.127)
Year of birth	−0.010*** (0.003)	−0.006* (0.004)
Religious attendance	−0.169*** (0.040)	
Interest in politics	0.264*** (0.066)	
Conf.in civil service	0.351*** (0.074)	
Conf.in healthcare	0.221*** (0.081)	
Conf.in justice system	−0.189** (0.084)	
Confidence in educ.system	−0.189** (0.076)	
National pride _very proud	Baseline	
Nat pride_quite proud	−0.593*** (0.148)	−0.345** (0.137)
Nat pride_not very proud	−0.727*** (0.263)	−0.143 (0.252)
Nat pride_not at all proud	−0.226 (0.333)	0.509 (0.354)
Constant	−1.161*** (0.337)	−0.441* (0.240)
Observations	1,500	1,500
Log Likelihood	−837.256	−774.144
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,698.511	1,564.287
R2 Tjur	0.064	0.015

Dependent variable: Indexbin (1-never justify).
*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.

TABLE 2 Gamma regressions (individual-choice index without never-justifiers).

	EVS4	EVS5
Education (Higher)	−0.050*** (0.018)	−0.012 (0.018)
Gender (female)	−0.015 (0.017)	−0.009 (0.018)
Year of birth	−0.001 (0.001)	−0.001** (0.001)
Religious attendance	−0.017*** (0.006)	
Confid.civil service	0.028*** (0.010)	
Confid.justice system	−0.033*** (0.010)	
Religiosity_Relig.person	Baseline	
Religiosity_Not religious	−0.113*** (0.032)	
Religiosity_atheist	−0.064 (0.047)	
National pride _very proud	Baseline	
Nat pride_quite proud	−0.002 (0.020)	−0.004 (0.019)
Nat pride_not very proud	−0.060** (0.028)	0.005 (0.036)
Nat pride_not at all proud	0.010 (0.049)	−0.078 (0.049)
Constant	0.637*** (0.046)	0.519*** (0.029)
Observations	1,084	1,174
Log Likelihood	−1,625.923	−1,946.415
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,271.845	3,910.829
R2 Nagelkerke	0.041	0.030

Dependent variable: Index without never-justifiers (the higher value of the DV, the less justification).
*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.

Gamma regressions

At the second step, we see even less explanatory power of conventional predictors in both waves, with the latter model being weaker (see Table 2). The expected effect of higher education is found in EVS 4, but turns insignificant in EVS 5, gender makes no difference in either wave, and the positive effect of older age on absolute non-justification holds in EVS 5, but not in EVS 4. National pride is significant in wave 4, but not in wave 5.

Likewise, more religious people are more likely to condemn abortion, divorce, and casual sex in wave 4, but not in wave 5. Less confidence in the national civil service, but more confidence in the justice system is associated with condemnation in wave 4, but not in wave 5.

Tobit regressions

Tobit regressions (see Table A1 in Appendix) are used for the robustness checks and show very similar results such as no effect of gender, a weak effect of higher education, and a solid effect of age. Religiosity, interest in politics, and confidence in organizations have basically the same effects as in the previous models, while national pride remains the only predictor working

well in both waves of surveys, although the effect is weaker in wave 5.

In our research, we use standard methods of regression analysis to drive to a conclusion that in Armenia attitudes toward abortion, divorce, and casual sex are hardly predicted by a standard bunch of factors that correlate with those attitudes in most countries of the world. Knowing that those variables are highly invariant (see Sokolov, 2018), we confirm the hypothesis that something specific, different from the majority of the countries happens in Armenia regarding those issues. We aim at explaining very conservative attitudes by nationalist feelings, confidence, and trust apart from evident controls of age, higher education, and gender. The picture we get from those analyses reminds us that the answers on sensitive questions should not be taken at their face value, but they can still convey much about the society.

Discussion

Armenia is a unique country where pro-choice attitudes are not predicted by the conventional factors of female gender and higher education, and even the age effect is fickle. On the other hand, the national pride is the strongest and most robust predictor. The picture of very low level of justification of abortion and divorce and one of the world's lowest ones as far

as casual sex is concerned, this picture looks like a portrait of a society that is going through a period of a massive conservative backlash united by the idea of pro-creation in the face of national security threat. This is the story that respondents seem to be telling. They report their opinions fairly openly, leaving fewer missing values than respondents in more repressive societies. However, can one take this picture at face value?

We know from the literature that condemnation of these practices in survey answers does not necessarily reflect the actual experience in a society where abortion, divorce, and premarital sex have been routine since the early Soviet period. Armenia underwent a quick and relatively successful modernization in the twentieth century as a part of the Soviet Union, which included modernization in the gender order and individual choice. However, after the collapse of the USSR, which was followed by war, economic hardship, neoliberalism, and precarious nation-building, a certain retrogression of attitudes and acceptance of more traditional gender roles occurred. We argue that this retrogression was not as profound as it seems; despite the propagation of conservative norms in the media, people continue to enjoy freedom in these as they did in the Soviet era. Fertility rate, for example, has remained the low for decades (about 1.7) and shows no rising trend, and country-level indicators of gender equality have been actually improving since the mid-2000s.

Does it necessarily mean that respondents just lie? Not really. Plugging in the concept of unwritten rules and open secrets, we express that behavior, especially in the private sphere, remains divorced from the publicly accepted official line. An immense discrepancy between what was said in public and what was practiced in private was a key feature of high socialism. Unwritten rules and open secrets, or a mismatch between the public discourse and private practices, is a post-Soviet habit inherited from the Soviet times, and can be empirically captured by low trust in state institutions. Therefore, individual-choice attitudes in post-Soviet societies may be better interpreted differently than they are in developed democracies.

It is also possible that in the context of an international survey, the issue of national dignity may affect people's responses, especially in those countries that are high on national pride. They may want to present their society in a more favorable light by giving such answers that reflect socially approved norms of their country. We think that most respondents have some notion of the real abortion rate, among the highest in the world in Armenia. However, "national pride," which is so high in Armenia, may prevent people from acknowledging this in a conversation with a stranger. The observed association of higher national pride and stricter condemnation of pro-choice attitudes (controlling for numerous other predictors) supports this argument.

Deindustrialization, mass unemployment, emigration, political corruption, and low trust in institutions, on the one hand, and the recurring war with Azerbaijan, on the other, has

lasting effects on Armenians' understanding of the future of their nation. National values, however, are deeply intertwined with patriarchy.

This preoccupation with national pride definitely stems from the tragic episodes of Armenian history and post-Soviet nation-building based on the idea of a small, dispersed, but unique and proud nation. The strong association of national pride and pro-choice attitudes points to the gendered nature of nation-building which is typical in post-Soviet countries. Since the 1980s, multiple studies have questioned the assumption of nationalism as a gender-neutral project by showing the importance of gender and sexuality for nation-building projects: "Nationalism frequently becomes the language through which sexual control and repression are justified and through which masculine prowess is expressed and strategically exercised" (Mayer, 2012).

This article may also contribute to our understanding of gender backlash in other parts of the world where one observes the rise of conservative politicians and attitudes even as modernization continues (Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

The subtle process of modernization can be seen in our data, as we observe how some effects wane in the later wave of the survey, while younger age becomes a stronger predictor of less conservative attitudes, eclipsing national pride. This may signal that those generations that grew up in relatively stable recent conditions do not respond to the feeling of national threat with traditional attitudes as their elders do. This would open the door to a change both in practice and narrative, raising the level of emancipation to that expected in such an urbanized and educated population as the Armenian.

Conclusion

In some countries, certain historical and cultural settings may lead to the situation when pro-choice attitudes are not predicted by the usual factors, such as education, gender or age. In the case of Armenia presented here, the attitudes appear extremely conservative and are associated with national pride. However, these results should not be interpreted immediately as a sign of a massive gender backlash or retrogression. The value modernization may proceed quietly and privately under the guise of traditional norms. The people in such societies may have various reasons to report normative attitudes on sensitive issues. These may include sheer fear in repressive environments, the legacy of "open secrets" in post-Soviet contexts, or national pride motivating people to present their country right and proper. Thus, learning more about each context is crucial to avoid a simplified or wrong conclusion.

Further research may find out whether the observed link between national pride and lifestyle intolerance is present in other countries, including the Western ones, or this is a specifically post-Soviet phenomenon, or something typical

for developing countries that recently have experienced life-threatening and life-altering situations such as war, economic perturbations, and political crises. Likewise, further research may elucidate to what extent the open secrets, or public declaration of neo-traditionalist attitudes divorced from people's real behavior, extend to other contexts.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

VK performed the statistical analysis. SL and VK wrote the manuscript. EP revised it. All authors conceived and designed the study, manuscript revisions, read, and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be held accountable for the content.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Table A1 Tobit models.

	EVS 4	EVS 5
Education (Higher)	0.224**(0.104)	0.171 (0.109)
Gender (female)	0.119 (0.096)	0.003 (0.107)
Year of birth	0.008*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)
Interest in politics	−0.197*** (0.052)	
Confid.civil service	−0.321*** (0.060)	
Confid.in NATO	0.172*** (0.053)	
Confid.healthcare system	−0.196*** (0.064)	
Confid.justice system	0.291*** (0.065)	
Confid.major companies	−0.123** (0.061)	
Religiosity_Relig.person	Baseline	
Religiosity_not_religious	0.736*** (0.234)	
Religiosity_atheist	0.460 (0.319)	
National pride _very proud	Baseline	
National pride_quite proud	0.370*** (0.111)	0.231** (0.112)
National pride_not very proud	0.769*** (0.182)	0.073 (0.210)
National pride_not at all proud	0.245 (0.270)	0.076 (0.337)
Constant	1.403*** (0.264)	0.928***(0.159)
Observations	1,500	1,500
Log Likelihood	−2,526.025	−2,786.187
Wald Test	112.539*** (df = 12)	31.043*** (df = 10)
R2 Nagelkerke	0.074	0.017

1-never justifiable, 10-always justifiable. Dependent variable: Justifiability of abortion + divorce + casual sex.
*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

Who perceives women's rights as threatening to men and boys? Explaining modern sexism among young men in Europe

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While Western democracies have become increasingly gender-equal over the past decades, recent research documents a backlash against gender equality in the form of rising modern sexism. Previous research shows that modern sexism predicts political attitudes and voting behavior that are detrimental to women's empowerment and liberalism. Yet, we know little about which factors explain modern sexist attitudes and how they operate across multiple country contexts. Building on modern conceptualizations of sexism, we theorize that (perceived) increases in competition between men and women provoke modern sexism among young men in particular. Using an original measure that approximates dimensions of modern sexism embedded in the 2021 EQI survey, capturing 32,469 individuals nested in 208 NUTS 2 regions in 27 European Union countries, we demonstrate that young men are most likely to perceive advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities. This is particularly true for young men who (a) consider public institutions in their region as unfair, and (b) reside in regions with recent increases in unemployment resulting in increased competition for jobs. Our findings highlight the role of perceived competition between men and women in modern sexism and contradict the argument that older generations are most likely to backlash against progressive values, potentially adding to research explaining the recent backlash against gender equality.

KEYWORDS

modern sexism, young men, institutional trust, unemployment, competition between men and women

Introduction

While much research documents increasing gender equality and sexual freedom in Western democracies and globally since the second half of the twentieth century (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Goldin, 2014; Alexander et al., 2016), recent research describes the emergence of a movement countering these developments (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2018). Radical right political actors, religious organizations, and civil society promote modern sexist positions and organize against feminism and sexual freedom, aiming to preserve the patriarchal and heteronormative social order (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2018). Arguably, there is a backlash against feminism and sexual freedom that is politically manifested, for instance, in politicians' overt sexism and laws restricting

women's and LGBTQI+ rights in countries like the United States, Poland, Hungary, and others (Grzebalska and Peto, 2018; Darakchi, 2019; Faludi et al., 2019; Maxwell and Shields, 2019; Cabezas, 2022). Yet, we know little about the factors explaining modern sexist attitudes at the individual level and across different country contexts.

According to Manne (2017, 79), sexism serves to justify and rationalize patriarchal social relations characterized by the structural dominance of men over women. The psychological literature explains sexist attitudes mostly by ideology (e.g., Christopher and Wojda, 2008; Mosso et al., 2012; Hellmer et al., 2018; Van Assche et al., 2019), and personality traits (e.g., Akrami et al., 2011; Hellmer et al., 2018). While this research is insightful, we still know little about the demographic factors and contextual factors explaining sexist attitudes.

Regarding demographic factors, cultural backlash theory holds that older generations hold more conservative values and younger generations are more progressive (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Yet, there is research also demonstrating that different generations hold similar cultural attitudes (Schäfer, 2021). Similarly, while some scholars argue and find that men are more sexist than women (Glick et al., 2004; Russell and Trigg, 2004; Christopher and Mull, 2006; Roets et al., 2012), others find that gender explains only very little of the variation in sexism (Glick et al., 2004; Russell and Trigg, 2004; Roets et al., 2012; Van Assche et al., 2019). Regarding contextual factors, modernization theorists argue that economic and institutional development leads to more emancipative values, including gender equality and sexual freedom (Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Welzel, 2013). However, the recent backlash against feminism is observed in Western democracies with relatively developed economies and political institutions, such as the United States (Ratliff et al., 2019) and the United Kingdom (Green and Shorrocks, 2021). More research is thus needed on demographic and contextual factors explaining sexism.

Building on the concepts of hostile sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996), envious prejudice (Fiske et al., 1999), and modern sexism (Swim et al., 1995), we theorize that perceived competition between men and women explains sexism among individuals who may expect to lose from this competition. According to our argument, these individuals are disproportionately young men, as they are most likely to perceive women's competition as a potential threat to their future life courses. Further in line with our argument, young men who perceive institutions in their regions to be unfair react more strongly to this perceived competition and express more sexism, as they are more likely to consider this competition to be unfair[1].

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1   Given that we measure perceived institutional impartiality rather than actual institutional impartiality, we cannot treat this indicator as a truly contextual factor. Residents of regions with high institutional impartiality may also perceive institutions to be unfair, depending on their political beliefs and personal experiences.

Finally, young men residing in regions that record recent increases in unemployment will express more sexism due to the increased competition in the labor market, which they may perceive to be further aggravated by increasing women's labor force participation.

We test these hypotheses using large-n survey data ($n =$ 32,469) from 27 European Union countries at the regional NUTS 2 level (208 regions), analyzing agreement with an original measure that captures sexism in response to perceived competition between men and women. While support for advancing women's rights is relatively high across the sample, we find that young men, in particular, express the greatest opposition, especially if they distrust public institutions in their region of residence or if they reside in regions with recently rising unemployment, which supports our theoretical argument and contrasts expectations from cultural backlash theory.

This study contributes to the existing literature on sexism, first, by analyzing representative cross-national regional-level survey data, which allows us to test individual-level demographic and regional-level contextual factors predicting sexism across 27 European Union countries. Theoretically, we contribute to the literature on sexism by theorizing and testing the role of perceived competition between men and women in young men's sexism. The focus on perceived competition between men and women may be particularly apt for explaining rising sexism in countries marked by relatively advanced gender equality, where women may more realistically come to represent a competitive threat to men. Our study thus contributes to explaining rising sexism in a population group that is often expected to be relatively progressive: young men in economically developed democracies.

This paper proceeds by defining modern understandings of sexism and presenting previous literature on predictors of sexist attitudes. Second, we theorize perceived competition between men and women as a driver of sexism, especially in relatively gender-equal contexts and among young men. Third, we present the methods and data used in this study, followed by the results of our analysis. We conclude by situating our results within the findings of previous research.

Defining sexism

According to Manne (2017, 79), "sexism should be understood primarily as the 'justificatory' branch of a patriarchal order, which consists in ideology that has the overall function of rationalizing and justifying patriarchal social relations", where the patriarchal order is characterized by women being "positioned as subordinate in relation to some man or men [. . .], the latter of whom are thereby [. . .] dominant over the former, on the basis of their genders (among other relevant intersecting factors)" (45). Sexist attitudes are thus defined as attitudes that justify a system of men's dominance over women, for instance

by emphasizing natural differences between men as the stronger and women as the weaker sex. However, with increasing gender equality in various societies over the past decades, sexism has often become more subtle than the above definition suggests.

Reacting to the need to assess subtle sexism in a context of increasing gender equality, Swim et al. (1995) developed the Modern Sexism Scale. Accordingly, examples of modern sexism are the denial of women's continued discrimination and the rejection of demands for increased gender equality. It is based on the perception that gender equality is already established and further anti-discrimination laws or measures to promote women would result in special favors toward women.

Similarly, Glick and Fiske (1996) developed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory that distinguishes between hostile and benevolent sexism to explain how even seemingly positive stereotypes about women reinforce patriarchal order. They describe sexism as an ambivalent case of prejudice because it is not only hostile and involves intimate relationships and emotional dependency between the dominant and subordinated population groups. Thus, while hostile sexism justifies women's discrimination, for instance by ascribing less competence to women than to men, benevolent sexism reinforces traditional gender roles through positive stereotyping, for instance by considering women as the better parent. Such positive stereotyping does not involve hostility toward women but still serves to uphold traditional gender roles, wherein women are considered the "weaker" sex and deserve protection, and men are the providers and protectors. Further, Glick and Fiske (1996) argue that hostile and benevolent sexism are positively correlated, despite their contradictions, making sexism an ambivalent concept. For the study at hand, hostile sexism and its focus on competitive gender differences and the zero-sum nature of gender equality are of particular relevance, as we further elaborate in the theory section. Both the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and the Modern Sexism Scale constitute bases for our theorization of perceived competition between men and women as a driver of sexism among young men in relatively gender-equal contexts.

Predicting sexism by psychological, ideological, demographic, and contextual factors

Previous research has mostly explained sexism psychologically by various personality traits and ideologies. These include dimensions of the Big Five personality traits, especially openness and agreeableness (Akrami et al., 2011; Grubbs et al., 2014), as well as empathy and the ability to take others' perspectives (Hellmer et al., 2018), which are all considered to be negatively related to sexism. On the other hand, the personality trait of psychological entitlement, i.e., the notion of oneself deserving special treatment, is shown to

be positively related to sexism (Grubbs et al., 2014; Hammond et al., 2014).

The most prominent ideological explanatory factors used to predict sexism are social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism (Sibley et al., 2007; Christopher and Wojda, 2008; Akrami et al., 2011; Hart et al., 2012; Mosso et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2014; Van Assche et al., 2019). Herein, high levels of social dominance orientation refer to an understanding of intergroup relations as hierarchical, marked by the superiority of one group over another. Right-wing authoritarianism then implies the favoring of strong authorities, social cohesion, and collective security (Sibley et al., 2007). While both of these ideological factors are shown to be positively related to sexism, studies reveal that social dominance orientation is particularly related to hostile sexism, and right-wing authoritarianism is particularly predictive of benevolent sexism (Christopher and Mull, 2006; Sibley et al., 2007; Christopher and Wojda, 2008). Related to authoritarianism and the emphasis on traditional values, political conservatism has also been shown to predict sexism (Christopher and Wojda, 2008; Mosso et al., 2012). In contrast, studies reveal mixed findings on the relationship between religiosity and sexism: Religiosity is shown to predict benevolent sexism in Spain, Belgium, and Turkey (Glick et al., 2002; Van Assche et al., 2019), but not in the Netherlands, Italy and the US (Mosso et al., 2012; Van Assche et al., 2019).

Regarding demographic factors, few existing studies explicitly focus on the effects of gender and age on sexism. Unsurprisingly, previous research agrees that men tend to be more sexist than women (Mosso et al., 2012; Hellmer et al., 2018; Cowie et al., 2019), where the difference is more pronounced for hostile than benevolent sexism (Glick et al., 2004), which can be explained by sexism being a system that discriminates against women. Herein, women who feel psychologically entitled, i.e., deserving of special treatment, are particularly likely to hold benevolent sexist attitudes (Hammond et al., 2014), since benevolent sexism emphasizes stereotypical positively-connoted traits of women. Yet, various studies also highlight that gender explains only little of the variation in sexism, and women and men hold relatively similar sexist attitudes, despite some existing differences (Glick et al., 2004; Roets et al., 2012).

The relationship between age and sexism is less clear. Glick et al. (2002) show that higher age is associated with higher levels of benevolent sexism among men and women in Spain, but not with hostile sexism. While Hammond et al. (2018) find a similarly linear effect of age on men's benevolent sexism in New Zealand, their study reveals that women's benevolent sexism, as well as men's and women's hostile sexism, have a U-shaped relationship with age. Accordingly, younger and older individuals are more sexist than middle-aged individuals. Investigating attitudes toward feminism, Fitzpatrick Bettencourt et al. (2011) find that age is related to negative attitudes toward feminism for women but not for men. Accordingly, young women hold more progressive attitudes toward feminism than

young men, whereas older men and women do not differ in their attitudes toward feminism. These findings, however, contradict Huddy et al. (2000) study showing that both young women and men hold more positive attitudes toward the women's movement than older individuals of the same gender. Theorizing and studying generational differences in cultural attitudes more generally, Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that older generations tend to hold more conservative attitudes and younger generations tend to hold more progressive attitudes. However, Schäfer (2021) demonstrates that these differences are explained by data specification rather than actual variation in the data and demonstrates that generations differ only a little from each other in their cultural attitudes. There is thus mixed evidence on the relationship between age, as well as the interaction between gender and age, and sexism.

Further, previous research considers the demographic factor of education. Glick et al. (2002), Hellmer et al. (2018) and Mosso et al. (2012) find that the level of education is negatively related to both benevolent and hostile sexism in men and women in Spain, Sweden, and the US. Van Assche et al. (2019) find that education predicts hostile sexism but not benevolent sexism in the Netherlands. However, other studies controlling for the effect of education find no significant effects in Italy (Mosso et al., 2012) and Turkey (Van Assche et al., 2019).

Most of the existing studies on sexism are difficult to compare, which complicates any inference about the influence of demographic or contextual variables on sexism. This lack of comparability stems from at least two factors: First, many studies use unrepresentative convenience samples, often consisting of undergraduate students (e.g., Russell and Trigg, 2004; Hellmer et al., 2018), which limits variation in age and place of residence. Second, most previous research consists of single-country studies, and many studies are conducted in the US context (e.g., Christopher and Wojda, 2008; Rosenthal et al., 2014), which hinders cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons. Some exceptions are a cross-national study by Glick et al. (2004) including population samples from 19 countries worldwide, as well as Mosso et al. (2012)'s comparison of the US and Italian contexts, and Van Assche et al. (2019)'s study on Belgium, the Netherlands, and Turkey. However, neither of these studies test for contextual effects. While Mosso et al. (2012) and Van Assche et al. (2019) discuss their results in light of cultural differences between their studied countries' gender norms and religion, Glick et al. (2004) do not elaborate on contextual factors that could potentially explain country differences. To our knowledge, subnational contextual factors, such as regional economic performance or urbanization, are not considered in the psychological literature on sexism.

However, the literature on emancipative values provides evidence of the effects of contextual factors that is relevant to the role of context in understanding sexist attitudes. Emancipative values include gender equality and sexual freedom (Welzel, 2013) and thus stand in contrast to sexism.

According to modernization theory, emancipative values emerge in contexts characterized by economic development and democratic institutions, as existential security promotes the valuing of individual self-expression, education encourages critical thinking and political participation stimulates the questioning of authorities (e.g., Inglehart and Baker, 2000). Accordingly, in contexts marked by economic development and democratic institutions where individuals experience existential security, in-groups will be more tolerant and less hostile toward outgroups (Welzel, 2013). While the theory refers to various kinds of ingroup-outgroup relations, it also applies to relations between men and women and resulting advances in gender equality (Alexander and Welzel, 2011). Based on the literature on emancipative values, sexist attitudes are therefore expected to be less pronounced in economically developed contexts and in contexts with well-functioning democratic institutions. Yet, as the emancipative values literature usually considers an index of various values, more research is needed on contextual factors explaining sexism in particular.

While economic development is shown to lead to emancipative values, economic crises can in turn set back previous achievements in gender equality, institutionally and in terms of individual behavior: Feminist economists show that neoliberal austerity measures result in the cutting of women-dominated public sector employment and public services, including care services (Rubery, 2015). Beyond these institutional setbacks, gender-based violence has been shown to increase during economic crises (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017, p.5). The contextual effect of the economy may thus affect sexism both ways: While sexism may decline as economies develop, economic downturns can lead to increased sexism.

Theorizing perceived competition as a driver of sexism

We address the gap in the literature on demographic and contextual factors influencing sexism by theorizing that perceived competition between men and women acts as a driver of sexism. We hypothesize that this is the case, particularly among young men who (a) perceive public institutions in their region to be unfair, and (b) reside in regions that register recent increases in unemployment. This theorization is based on group and status threat theory, as well as the concepts of hostile sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996), envious prejudice (Fiske et al., 1999), and modern sexism (Swim et al., 1995), as well as more recent studies focussing on the notion of competition between men and women (Kasumovic and Kuznekoff, 2015; Mansell et al., 2021). These concepts were developed to assess subtle sexism as societies become increasingly gender equal. They are thus adequate to capture sexism in European democracies today.

While group threat theory has mostly been used to explain opposition to immigration (e.g., Bobo and Hutchings, 1996),

it can be applied to intergroup relations more generally, and in this case to gender relations. Studies show that perceived competition is an important driver of perceived outgroup threat, especially among ingroup members with low socioeconomic status (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996) and when perceptions of economic insecurity increase (Kuntz et al., 2017). On the contrary, other studies show that status threat perceived by high-status ingroup members, rather than economic hardship experienced by low-status ingroup members, explains support for traditional status hierarchies (Mutz, 2018). Relating status threat theory to gender relations, Grabowski et al. (2022) find that gender status threat perceptions correlate with hostile sexism, amongst others. While group and status threat theory explain threat perceptions through different mechanisms, i.e., economic or status threat perceptions, both mechanisms are related to perceived intergroup competition. Applying these theories to gender relations thus provides the framework for theorizing perceived competition as a driver of sexism.

Glick and Fiske (1996) theorize that the notion of competitive gender differences is a core component of hostile sexism, which holds that "male-female relationships are characterized by a power-struggle" (p. 507), and this notion results in men's desire to dominate women. This is in line with evidence showing that hostile sexism is related to the perception of gender relations as a zero-sum game: As women gain, men lose (Ruthig et al., 2017). Advances in women's rights may thus be perceived as a challenge to men's dominance (Glick and Fiske, 2011). This is related to the notion of envious prejudice, which Fiske et al. (1999) theorize to emerge in an ingroup in response to an outgroup that is perceived as competent. Accordingly, the outgroup's perceived group status predicts its perceived competence and competitiveness. In the case of sexism, men constitute the ingroup and women constitute the outgroup. As women become more powerful in society, men may thus perceive them as more competent and therefore as an increasing competition for their own position in society. Further, Fiske et al. (1999) theorize that perceived competence and perceived warmth condition each other in opposite directions: As an outgroup is perceived as competitive, it is also perceived as lacking warmth, and vice versa. Thus, while the ingroup respects the outgroup for their competence, they also dislike them, which the authors label "envious prejudice". Therefore, men will develop envious prejudice toward, for example, career women, and perceive them as competent but cold individuals. Finally, the concept of modern sexism as theorized by Swim et al. (1995) reflects the above notions of competitive gender differences and envious prejudice. It captures resentment for women who push for greater economic and political power. In modern sexism, such demands are considered as demands for special favors, because discrimination against women is considered to have already ended. Overall, the currently most prominent modern conceptualizations of sexism, hostile sexism as a part of ambivalent sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996) and

modern sexism (Swim et al., 1995), thus share the component of perceived competition between men and women.

The theory that sexism is driven by perceived competition between the genders is supported by research showing that low-status men are more likely than high-status men to show hostility toward women who enter a previously men-dominated arena because low-status men will more likely lose from the hierarchy disruption caused by these women (Kasumovic and Kuznekoff, 2015). Similarly, Mansell et al. (2021) show that men become more sexist after receiving negative feedback about their performance if their performance is assessed relative to women's performance. Our study adds to the hitherto scarce research on the role of perceived competition between men and women in sexism, which Kasumovic and Kuznekoff (2015, p. 2) consider an "evolutionary" perspective on sexism.

Institutional distrust and perceived competition

We further theorize that institutional distrust is positively related to individuals' notion of competition between population groups, and in this case between men and women. Previous research suggests that the relationship between institutional (dis)trust and solidarity or tolerance between different population groups is mediated by social trust. Social trust is here defined as "confidence that people will manifest sensible and when needed, reciprocally beneficial behavior in their interactions with others" (Welch et al., 2005, 457). Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) argue that the degree to which individuals are solitary and tolerant toward minorities and "people who are not like themselves" (41), as well as the degree to which individuals believe that those with fewer resources should be granted more resources are both related to social trust. More precisely, high levels of social trust should be related to more solidarity and tolerance between population groups and therefore reduce the notion of competition between them.

While there is a large literature on determinants of social trust, Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) argue that two closely related types of equality can evoke social trust: institutional equality of opportunities and economic equality of resources. Unfair institutions that discriminate against certain people and/or are corrupt create inequality of opportunities and a culture of cheating, which in turn leads to individuals doubting people's trustworthiness in general (Kumlin and Rothstein, 2005). Similarly, economic inequality exacerbates the perceived inequality of opportunities, as some population groups possess more resources than others, and thus amplifies the social distrust created by unfair institutions (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005). Overall, perceptions of unfair treatment by institutions go hand in hand with a social context marked by little solidarity or tolerance between different population groups.

Based on the above argument, perceived institutional fairness should be related to high levels of social trust, which in turn should create solidarity between population groups and reduce the degree to which they perceive each other as competing. For the case of men and women, the notion of competition between men and women should therefore be less prevalent when individuals perceive institutions as fair. In contrast, individuals who perceive institutions as unfair should more likely perceive competition between men and women.

Hypotheses

Building on the above theorization on the role of perceived increases in competition between men and women in sexism, we hypothesize that younger men are particularly likely to react to this competition by expressing higher levels of sexism. Because younger men are still at an early stage in their careers and personal life courses, they may perceive increased competition between men and women as more threatening to their future careers and life courses than older men who may feel that they already hold a more consolidated position in society. In contrast, women should not feel particularly threatened by increases in competition between men and women, as women's increased competitiveness relative to men should rather benefit than threaten women's position in society relative to men's[2]. The effect of perceived competition between men and women on young men's sexism should be particularly prominent in relatively gender-equal societies, where women are more likely to compete with men for positions of power. Given our sample of (globally speaking) relatively gender-equal European countries, we thus arrive at our first hypothesis that:

(1) Younger men are more likely than older men or women of any age group to consider advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities.

Further, we hypothesize that the perception of impartial public institutions in respondents' region of residence moderates this effect. Young men who perceive public institutions as unfair will more likely consider advances in women's rights as an unfair measures resulting in unjustified special treatment of women and disadvantages for men. In contrast, young men who trust public institutions to be impartial will feel less threatened by advances in women's rights, as they will trust their institutions to act in a nondiscriminatory way. Again, older men and women of any age will generally express less sexist attitudes, even if they perceive institutions to be unfair because they do not fear the

loss of opportunities as much as young men do. We thus arrive at our second hypothesis:

(2) Younger men who believe that public institutions in their area are unfair are more likely than older men or women of any age group with similar beliefs to consider advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities.

Finally, we hypothesize that recent regional changes in unemployment moderate this relationship. Young men's economic prospects may be affected by increased competition stemming from increased women's labor force participation. As unemployment rises, this competition is aggravated. Again, this effect should be particularly pronounced for young men in their early careers, as older men tend to have more consolidated careers and should therefore feel less threatened by increased competition between men and women, and women of any age group should not fear losing from such competition. We thus arrive at our final hypothesis that:

(3) Younger men residing in regions with increasing unemployment rates are more likely than older men or women of any age group to consider advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities.

By investigating these hypotheses, we contribute to the understanding of demographic and contextual factors' influence on individuals' sexism, as well as the role of perceived competition between men and women in sexism, especially in relatively gender-equal contexts.

Research design, sample, and data

To test the hypotheses, we rely on observational data from the latest round of the European Quality of Government Index survey (Charron et al., 2021). The EQI's fourth round survey contains a total sample of 129,991 respondents across 27 European Union member states. However, our dependent variable was asked to a sub-set of 32,469 respondents, and our sample here corresponds to such. The data was collected during autumn and winter 2020/21 at the NUTS 2 regional level, comprising 208 regions[3]. More on the sample, survey, and administration can be found in Appendix 1.

While the survey mainly focuses on perceptions and experiences of corruption, impartiality, and quality of public services, several additional demographic questions are included, along with some items on political values, trust, and partisanship. To proxy the opposition to advances in women's rights and capture the notion of increasing competition between

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2   Conservative women may constitute an exception to this and also feel threatened by changing norms on women's role in society, as they may fear to lose status and recognition for their way of living relative to women who do not adhere to traditional gender roles.

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3   Given that the sexism question is only asked in the most recent 2021 EQI survey wave, we can only analyze one time period.

men and women, we ask for agreement with the following statement: "*Advancing women's and girls' rights has gone too far because it threatens men's and boys' opportunities*". Respondents were asked to place themselves on a 1–10 scale, whereby "1" indicates full disagreement and "10" indicates full agreement[4]. The weighted average across the sample is 3.23, which implies that the majority of citizens express disagreement with the statement and thus do not consider women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities[5].

To test H1, we simply rely on two standard demographic questions, namely respondent's age and gender. Gender is considered binary (man = 1) and age is broken down into four categories: 18–29, 30–49, 50–64, and 65+[6]. To test whether younger men, in particular, express the highest agreement with the statement above, we construct a simple interaction between these two variables.

The test of H2 requires a proxy of one's perception of institutional impartiality. The EQI contains six such questions that ask about respondents' perceptions of the degree to which certain citizens are "favored" within certain public services, as well as the degree to which people believe everyone is 'treated equally' (see Appendix 1 for wording). We take the battery of six questions on fairness and impartiality and construct an index (standardized *via z*-scores), whereby three are positively framed (stronger "agree" implies more perceived impartiality) and three are negatively framed (stronger "agree" implies less perceived impartiality). We re-scale all questions such that higher values indicate that one believes the institutions in one's area are fair and impartial. We then construct a three-way interaction between the impartiality index, the age group, and the gender of the respondent.

We test H3 *via* data from Eurostat on unemployment trends. To enhance the precision and increase the number of observations at the macro level, we take estimates at the regional level (NUTS 2). To proxy recent changes in employment opportunities for people in a given region, we take the difference in the long-term unemployment rates from 2019 to 2020, with positive (negative) numbers implying that unemployment has

increased (decreased) during that time period. We focus on long-term unemployment to best mitigate the possible short-term and unique effects of the pandemic.

As our research design is observational, we include a number of control variables in addition to the main variables of interest to mitigate endogeneity. We include proxies of socio-economic status, income, and education, which we expect to correlate with the dependent variable, as well as with gender and age. We control for the population size of residence, as people in urban areas tend to have more progressive gender values. We also account for survey administration (online vs. telephone). In addition, in particular, for H2 where perceptions of impartiality and opposition to women's rights are most likely endogenous, we include several question items on partisanship and political values as control variables. Such controls also allow us to evaluate the construct validity of our outcome variable (Adcock and Collier, 2001)[7]. At the regional level for our cross-level interaction models, we control for a measure of the 'human development index' (HDI), which is an index of economic, health, and education development.

Our dependent variable has a non-normal, right-skewed distribution, and thus we rely on a generalized linear, negative binomial model to estimate the main models[8]. In the Appendix, we also replicate the generalized models with standard linear models, in which we find similar substantive effects of the variables. To account for the nested nature of the data, we employ country-fixed effects and clustered standard errors[9]. To adjust for differences between the sample and population, we employ post-stratification (gender, age, education, and partisanship) and design weights (population of region and country) in all models.

Empirical results

We begin with an overview of the correlates of "opposition to advances in women's rights" in Figure 1. The figure highlights two models, one with standard demographic controls (hollow circles) and the second which includes political values and partisanship (gray circles). The variables' coefficients nearly all point in the expected direction, which demonstrates validity for our outcome variable. Namely, men show greater opposition to advances in women's rights, while higher educated and higher income individuals show less opposition. Age is negatively

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4   We pre-tested the questions in a pilot study in Germany, Italy and Romania in May 2020 (*n* = 3,000, 1,000 per country) and found the item to be highly correlated with other proxies of social conservatism, such as partisanship and other GAL-TAN proxies.

5   Roughly 2.5% responded "don't know/refuse" and these are dropped from the main analyses, resulting in a relevant sample of 31,602. We checked if the non-responses were systematically linked with our main variables of interest via logistic model (see Appendix Figure A6). We find that while low-educated responded tend to have higher non-responses rates, our main variables of gender, age, impartiality and unemployment are all non-significant predictors of non-response.

6   While the data only allows for a binary operationalization of gender, we acknowledge the existence of other genders than men and women.

7   We report further validity and equivalence checks of the dependent variable in Appendix, Section Checking the Validity and Equivalence of the Measure of Sexism across the Sample.

8   Tests for the Poisson model showed evidence of overdispersion, and thus the negative binomial estimation is used here.

9   An empty hierarchical model shows that just 2.5% of the unexplained variation is at the country level, while the remaining is at the individual level.

correlated with opposition to women's rights, indicating that older individuals are less opposed to women's rights, which we unpack in the subsequent analysis. All coefficients of proxies of political values, namely economic left-right orientation ("support redistribution measures") and GAL-TAN attitudes ("opposition to immigration", support for "traditional values" and "support for gay marriage") point in the expected directions, while partisan affiliation is insignificant under control for political values.

Next, we test H1, with an interaction between the age and gender variables above. Figure 2 summarizes the effect of the interaction, showing the level of opposition to advances in women's rights among men and women over the four age groups. The figure clearly shows evidence for H1: The group that expresses the most opposition toward advances in women's rights are the young men. While women across all age cohorts show very low levels of opposition to women's rights, the relationship between age and the dependent variable among men is nearly linear and negative[10]. Older men respondents show the lowest levels of opposition to women's rights—indistinguishable from women of the same age, which lends support to recent evidence against the idea of older generations being most opposed to changes in modern, liberal values (see Schäfer, 2021). The differences are substantively interesting, for example, the 0.8 difference in the dependent variable between young men (4.07) and young women (3.27) is slightly larger than the gap in opposition to women's rights between the average Green party (2.63) and Christian Democrat (CDU) (3.35) supporter in Germany. The 1.03 gap between the youngest and oldest cohorts of men (4.07 vs. 3.04) is equivalent to that of the average supporter of Geert Wilders' radical right Party for Freedom (PVD) and the Liberal Democrats 66 (3.94 vs. 2.93) in the Netherlands. These findings support our first hypothesis that younger men are more likely than older men or women of any age group to consider advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities.

To test H2 that younger men that have perceptions of institutional unfairness and lack of impartiality will feel most threatened by advancements in women's rights, a three-way interaction term is included (age*gender*impartiality perception) in the model. The results are summarized in Figure 3. The findings are quite striking and lend evidence to the hypothesis. First, we see that women again express low levels of the dependent variable regardless of age and level of impartiality, yet the slope is negative and significant for three of the four age cohorts (save 30–49) across values of impartiality. Second, among those with a low perception of impartiality, young men clearly express greater agreement with the statement that women's rights have 'gone too far', and differ significantly

from all other age/gender cohorts. Third, the negative slope of impartiality is steepest among young men (yet consistent among all men), and thus we observe convergence in support for advances in women's rights among people who think that their institutions are fair and impartial, as there is no significant difference between men or women of any age at high values of impartiality[11].

Finally, we move to our test of H3, which predicts that younger men, in particular, will demonstrate the greatest opposition to advances in women's rights for reasons of relative competition in the labor force. We proxy this *via* our measure of recent changes in the structural, long-term unemployment rates at the regional level and include a three-way interaction with this unemployment variable and the age/gender variables. Figure 4 summarizes the findings of the interaction. We see three noteworthy results from this test. First, there is a clear relationship between age and the outcome variable over the range of unemployment changes among men. In line with our hypothesis, increases in unemployment are positively related to the dependent variable among younger men—with the steepest slope among the 18–29 cohort. For example, comparing the predicted level of opposition of young men in regions where unemployment has declined the most (3.19) vs. increased the most (4.55) is equivalent to the gap between the average supporters of the Social Democrats (*Partito Democratico*) and center-right *Forza Italia* in Italy (2.8 vs. 4.1). Yet, among men 50 and older, there is a negative slope, demonstrating a divergence of opinion among men as the relative change in unemployment increases. When comparing the dependent variable between the youngest and oldest cohorts of men in regions where unemployment increased by 1% (the 95%ile), we see a predicted gap of 1.65 (4.34 vs. 2.79), which is larger than the difference between the average left-wing *Podemos* supporter and the average right-wing *Partido Popular* (PP) supporter in Spain (2.42 vs. 3.86). Among women, age does not significantly distinguish the dependent variable for 95% of the distribution of long-term unemployment. We see that the three cohorts aged 30 and older show virtually the same low levels of opposition to advances in women's rights regardless of relative changes in unemployment. In contrast, younger women show less opposition to advances in women's rights as more employment opportunities have come to their region in recent times. Yet at higher levels of the moderating variable (i.e., relative increases in structural unemployment), we see that the levels of the dependent variable converge among all age cohorts for women for the vast majority of the distribution of the moderating variable.

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10   In Appendix Figure A2, we replicate the interaction using a continuous measure of age rather than the categorical variables. We find the linear effects are nearly identical.

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11   In Appendix Figure A7, we provide a histogram of the distribution of impartiality perceptions among the young men cohort.
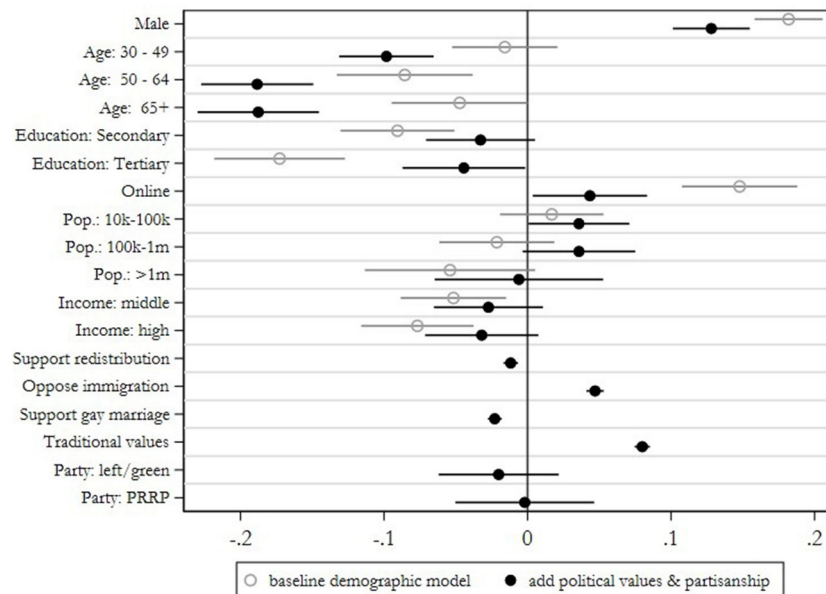
FIGURE 1
Covariates of opposition to advances in women's rights. Coefficients are from negative binomial estimation and express the expected change in the dependent variable from a one-unit increase in the covariate, with 95% CIs. The reference categories are: aged 18–29, less than secondary education, low income, and <10,000 inhabitants. Country fixed effects included (not shown), and standard errors clustered by region. Models include post-stratification and design weights. The number of observations for Models 1 and 2 is 31,602 and 29,299 respectively.
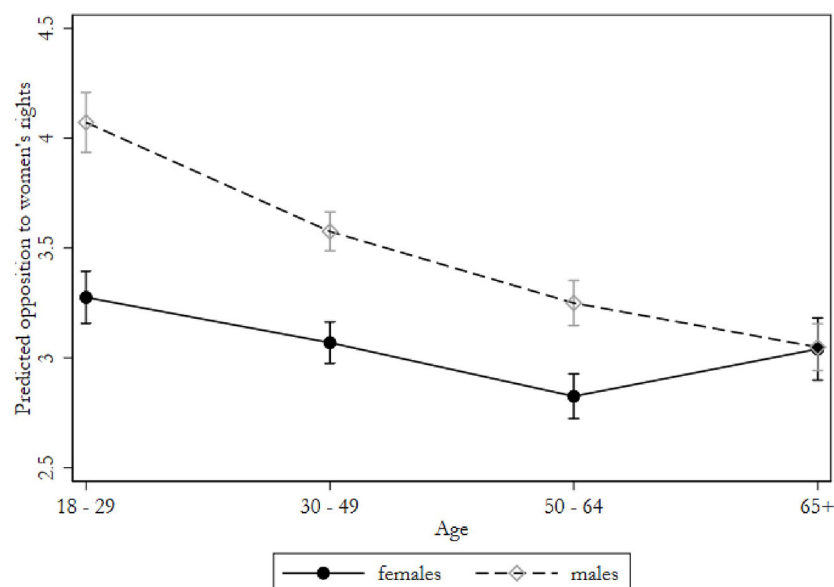
FIGURE 2
Test of H1: The interaction of age and gender. Predated values of the dependent variable from negative binomial estimation, with 95% CIs. Higher values of the dependent variable (y-axis) equal more opposition to advances in women's rights. Control variables from Figure 1 and country fixed effects are held constant at mean levels, and standard errors are clustered by region. All models include post-stratification and design weights.

FIGURE 3
Test of H2: The moderating effect of impartiality perceptions. Predated values of the dependent variable from negative binomial estimation, with 95% CIs. Higher values of the dependent variable (*y*-axis) equal more opposition to advances in women's rights. Control variables from Figure 1 and country fixed effects are held constant at mean levels, and standard errors are clustered by region. All models include post-stratification and design weights.
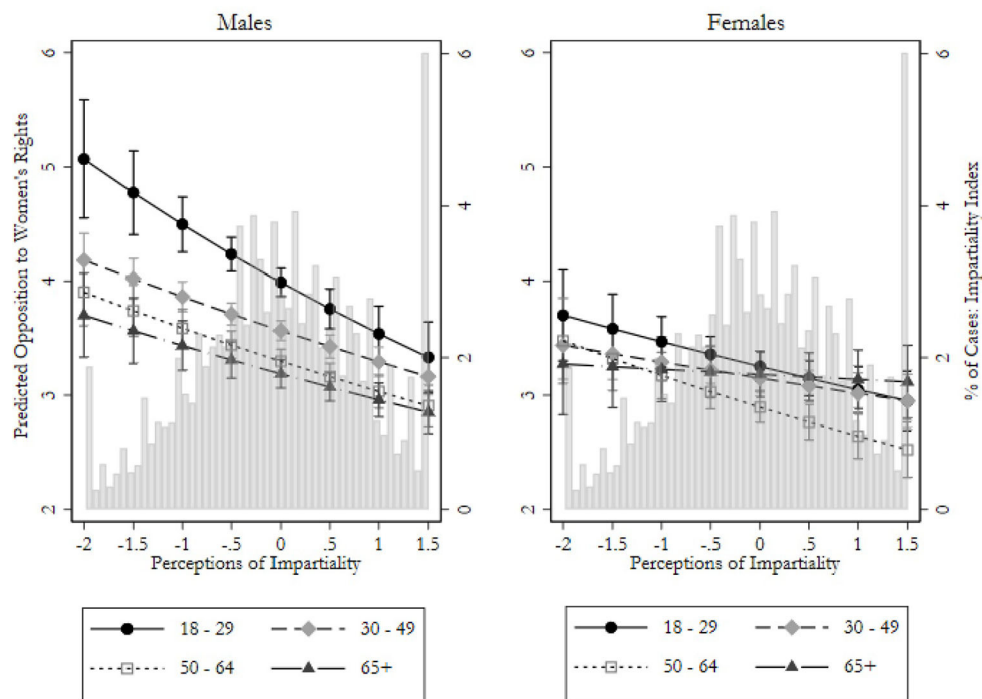
Alternative specifications and other robustness checks

We begin by checking several potential relationships in the data that we view as empirical implications of our findings. First, as our theory relies on a mechanism of competition, one implication of our results is that young men who perceive *public education* as unfair will more likely perceive advances in women's rights as a threat, as this institution, in particular, is key for career opportunities and advancements in the labor market. Given that girls outperform boys in school, on average (e.g., Pomerantz et al., 2002), young men may perceive competition between men and women in public education as unfair in particular. We test whether the findings for H2 are equally or even more pronounced among men and women of different age groups if moderated by only the education items of the impartiality index (Appendix Figure A4). Indeed, we find that opposition to advances in women's rights among young men is highly driven by perceptions of education impartiality. Moreover, opposition to advances in women's rights is not moderated by perceptions of education impartiality for any of the other age groups among men, nor among women at all. Thus, we interpret this as further evidence that perceived competition (i.e., perceived fairness in key institutions) is a

driving factor in young men's opposition to advances in women's rights. Second, again regarding H2, we check whether the context of impartiality matters (*via* 2017 impartiality scores of the EQI, Charron et al., 2019) in the interaction with age and gender. We do not find that the level of threat perception of advances in women's rights among young men depends on the context of "actual" fairness. Rather, it is the individual-level perception that matters most for our findings.

Third, we test the moderating effect of the contextual level of gender equality in the area in which respondents live. We approximate the contextual level of gender equality using data on the proportion of women in local governance (Sundström and Wängnerud, 2016). This could serve as an additional heuristic of contextual competition where higher proportions of women in local governance would imply higher levels of local gender equality and therefore higher (perceived) competition between men and women. We find here that there is in fact a divergence in opposition to advances in women's rights among younger men vs. older men, whereby opposition to advances in women's rights increases among the former group and decreases in the latter groups as a function of the local level of gender equality. This could suggest further evidence for the moderating effect of (perceived) competition between men and women on young men's opposition to advances in women's
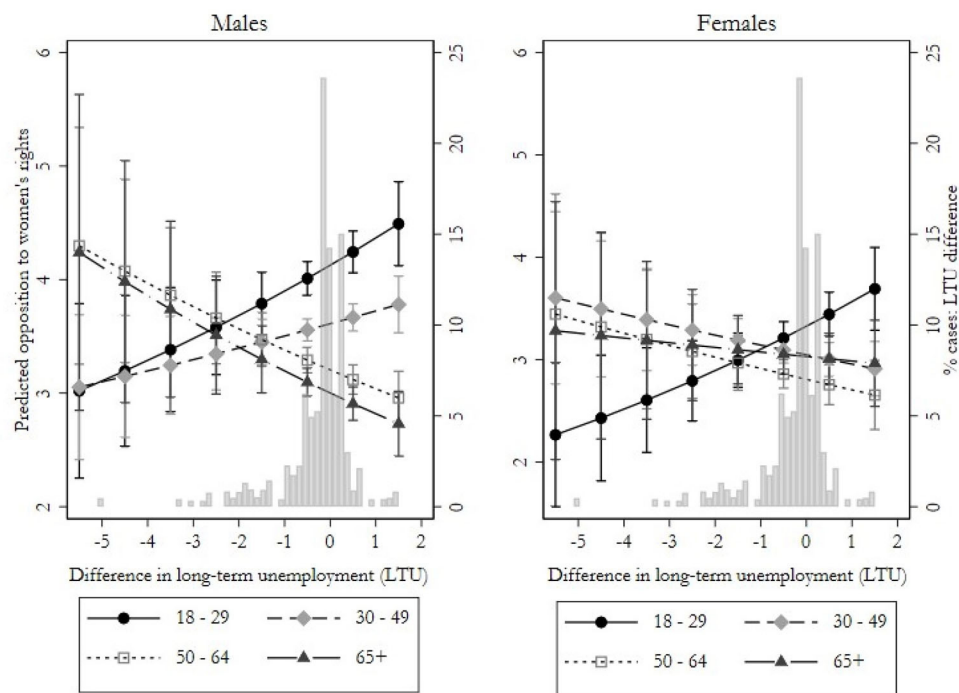
FIGURE 4
Test of H3: The moderating effect of relative changes in unemployment. Predated values of the dependent variable from negative binomial estimation, with 95% CIs. Higher values of the dependent variable (y-axis) equal more opposition to advances in women's rights. This figure shows the triple interaction between age, gender, and change in unemployment, with a histogram of the distribution of the change in long-term unemployment. Control variables from Figure 1, regional HDI, the long-term unemployment rate in 2019, and country fixed effects are held constant at mean levels, and standard errors are clustered by region. All models include post-stratification and design weights.

rights. In contrast, attitudes toward advances in women's rights among women respondents are unaffected by this moderator (Appendix Figure A5).

In addition, we replicate several of the main models using alternative specifications and alternative measures to test the robustness of the findings. First, we re-run the findings for Appendix Figure A1 using a linear, OLS model (Appendix Figure A1). Second, we check the sensitivity of the age categories as such and replicate Figure 2 using a continuous measure of age (Appendix Figure A2). Third, we show the test of H3 using recent changes in the unemployment rate rather than the long-term unemployment rates (Appendix Figure A3). In all cases, we find results that correspond with our main findings.

Discussion

Our empirical findings suggest that young men are particularly likely to perceive advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities (H1), especially if they perceive institutions as unfair (H2) and if they reside in regions observing increases in unemployment (H3), lending support to all our hypotheses. These findings entail several empirical and

theoretical contributions to the literature on modern sexism, as well as some limitations.

Empirically, first, our study measures and explains modern sexism across all 27 European Union countries using representative survey data at the subnational level, which allows us to test for demographic and contextual factors explaining modern sexism. It thereby contributes to previous research on sexism that is often based on unrepresentative samples in one or a few countries and therefore cannot make inferences on demographic or contextual factors. Second, we develop an original measure of modern sexism that captures the element of perceived competition between men and women, which we theorize to be a core component of young men's modern sexism in relatively gender-equal societies. While previous research mostly uses established question batteries to measure sexism and there is much merit in assessing sexism as the complex concept it is, focusing on one component of sexism contributes to understanding how drivers of different components of modern sexism can result in different levels of modern sexism across population groups, depending on their demographics and contexts.

Theoretically, we contribute to previous research by explaining the rise of modern sexism in a population group

that is usually considered rather progressive: young men in relatively gender-equal societies. We do so by theorizing that young men are particularly likely to feel threatened by perceived increases in competition between men and women because they are most likely to fear that their future life courses are affected by this competition. Our findings contradict the cultural backlash theory (Norris and Inglehart, 2019), which argues that older generations hold more socially conservative values than younger generations due to generational value change. As it seems, inter-generational differences in modern sexism are not fully explained by generational value change. Rather, our findings suggest that another mechanism may be at play: perceived competition between men and women for (future) power in society. These findings lend support to "evolutionary" (Kasumovic and Kuznekoff, 2015) rather than ideological explanations of sexism. Future research may further explore how different mechanisms lead to sexism in different population groups. For instance, while ideological explanations of sexism may better explain old generations' sexism, we demonstrate that evolutionary explanations of sexism better explain young men's sexism. There may thus be a U-shaped relationship between age and sexism, wherein potentially different types of sexism may be driven by different mechanisms for young men and older generations.

Further, we theoretically contribute to the literature on sexism and potentially the literature on prejudice more generally in relation to perceived institutional fairness. Our findings suggest that perceptions of unfair institutions are an important explanatory factor of sexism, especially among those who are most likely to fear competition between men and women, i.e., young men. Notions of competition between men and women may thus particularly result in modern sexism if this competition is perceived as unfair and as favoring women over men. This speaks to the research on how institutional trust is related to social trust, which in turn affects solidarity and tolerance (or inversely: prejudice) between different population groups (Kumlin and Rothstein, 2005; Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005). Our findings support this theory and test its implications for the case of sexism. Future research may investigate whether the same mechanism holds for other types of prejudice, such as prejudice based on race or ethnicity.

Finally, our findings are in line with modernization theory suggesting that economic development and existential security will eventually lead to the development of emancipative values, where emancipative values include gender equality (Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Welzel, 2013). We find that young men express particularly high levels of sexism in regions observing increasing unemployment. In light of modernization theory, this finding suggests that increased competition for jobs may trigger existential insecurity and therefore reduce tolerance toward out-groups, resulting in sexism fueled by the notion of competition between men and women. Finally, our subnational variation allows us to test the implications of modernization

theory in the relatively developed contexts of European Union countries, which are expected to promote emancipative values. We show that, even in developed contexts, subnational variation in development can explain the lack of emancipative values in the case of sexism.

Our study is subject to several limitations. First, our measure of modern sexism includes only one component of sexism, i.e., the notion of competition between men and women. While our theory and findings suggest that there is value in investigating single components of sexism because different components may drive sexism in different population groups, future research may focus on other individual components of modern sexism. Second, our measure of perceived institutional fairness is endogenous to political attitudes and values, and thus sexism. Whether an individual perceives institutions as unfair may not reflect actual institutional impartiality. While we address this problem by controlling for various political attitudes, we are unable to claim that institutional impartiality is related to sexism based on the findings in this study. Further, our data does not allow us to make claims on the direction of the relationship between perceived institutional fairness and sexism. Future research may further explore the relationship between actual and perceived institutional impartiality and sexism. Third, given the spatial nature of our data, we cannot distinguish between age and cohort—that is to say, if there is something specific about this particular group of young men (i.e., "Gen Z"/ young Millennials) or if the findings would apply to all young men irrespective of the cohort. Thus, more data over time would have to be collected to assess this distinction. Fourth, our data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many people experienced increased levels of economic insecurity. We address this problem by using changes in long-term unemployment, rather than short-term unemployment, as our contextual-level moderating variable. However, the deteriorating existential security experienced during the pandemic may have affected respondents' response to our sexism measure, as modernization theory would predict. Future studies may thus use data collected in periods of relative (economic) stability.

Finally, our theory is unable to explain our findings that older men are more sexist in regions with decreasing unemployment, and younger women are more sexist than older women in regions observing increasing unemployment. Future research may further explore this phenomenon.

Conclusion

This study theorizes and empirically demonstrates that young men are most likely to perceive advances in women's rights as a threat to men's opportunities, i.e., as competition, compared to men of other age groups and women of any age groups. We further show that this is particularly the case for young men who perceive institutions in their regions as

unfair, and young men who reside in regions that observe increases in long-term unemployment resulting in increased job competition. In other words, young men who live in conditions that make them more likely to perceive competition as (a) unfair and (b) growing are particularly likely to consider women's rights advances as a threat. This is shown based on survey data analysis of representative samples from all 27 European Union countries at the subnational NUTS 2 level ($n = 32,469$).

These findings contribute to four different lines of research. First, the large-scale cross-country analysis of demographic and contextual factors, and the focus on one particular component of modern sexism, i.e., competition between men and women, expand previous research on modern sexism. Second, our findings that young men are most likely to express this type of sexism contradict the cultural backlash theory that argues that old generations are most likely to hold socially conservative values due to generational value change. We thus suggest that the notion of competition between men and women operates in a different way than generational value change, and the different mechanisms drive sexism in different population groups. Third, we speak to the literature on the relationship between institutional trust and prejudice by confirming the theorized expectations for the case of sexism. Future research may investigate this relationship for other types of prejudice. Fourth, we contribute to modernization theory by theorizing and testing why sexism emerges in highly developed contexts such as the European Union countries. While modernization theory holds that these contexts should promote emancipative values, we suggest that these contexts may simultaneously evoke a notion of competition between men and women that potentially increases sexism among young men and challenges these values precisely because there is a level of gender equality that allows women to take certain jobs or political offices.

On the one hand, this study suggests that modern sexism in young men may be addressed by improving institutions' impartiality and institutional trust, as well as creating employment opportunities. In addition, improved communication on the potential advantages of women in societal power positions to young men, in particular, could mitigate modern sexism. On the other hand, the study's findings reveal an important challenge for the implementation of gender equality measures across European Union member states: young men's perception of women's rights as a threat, which may become particularly strong in times of economic downturns.

Data availability statement

Replication material for this study is openly available at: https://zenodo.org/record/6940021#.YuParIRBw2x.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

GO wrote the introduction, literature, theory, discussion, and concluding sections. NC conducted the empirical analysis and wrote the methods and results sections. AA provided particular input on theoretical perspectives. All authors contributed to the theoretical development, research design, and the design of the measurement, commented on the manuscript on several occasions, and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.909811/full#supplementary-material

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A tough woman around tender men: Dilma Rousseff, gendered double bind, and misogynistic backlash

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Dilma Rousseff's presidency ended in controversial form. The first woman elected to the position in Brazil, Rousseff's 2016 impeachment was seen as a coup by her supporters and as a necessary step for democracy by her detractors. With the Brazilian economy facing its worst recession in history and the Car Wash corruption scandal ravaging the political class, critics continually raised questions about Rousseff's leadership style and abilities. This article analyzes how this criticism in part can be attributed to gendered subjective understandings of preferred leadership traits. Using a thematic analysis of interviews with political actors in five different Brazilian states conducted in 2017 and 2018, we demonstrate that gender stereotypes and sexism fueled criticisms about women's political leadership. While Rousseff's presidency was riddled with problems, the president's leadership style and abilities were scrutinized in distinct gendered ways, indicating a gendered double bind and a backlash against women in politics.

KEYWORDS

Dilma Rousseff, gender, president, Brazil, misogyny, backlash

Introduction

In March of 2009, during a conference called "More Women in Power," then Chief of Staff Dilma Rousseff addressed her infamous brash personality: "In the spheres of power, a woman stops being seen as fragile, and that's unforgivable. This is where the history of the tough woman starts. It is true. I am a tough woman surrounded by tender men" (de Gois, 2009)[1]. At that time, Rousseff held Brazil's most powerful cabinet position, and rumors of a presidential run were gaining traction. Seven years later, after a successful presidential election campaign in 2010 and a victorious though contentious reelection in 2014, Rousseff was impeached and ultimately removed from power in

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1   The expression used by Rousseff in Portuguese was *homens meigos*. There are different ways to translate the word *meigo* to English, including tender and gentle. There is a gendered component in this expression, where men showing tenderness/gentleness may be seen as less masculine.

2016. Throughout Rousseff's tenure and especially during the impeachment proceedings, political actors and the general population questioned her leadership skills and fitness for office (Zdebskyi et al., 2015; de Bolle, 2016; Dantas, 2019; dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2021).

Using a thematic analysis of original interviews with political actors, we demonstrate that gender stereotypes and sexism fueled criticisms of Rousseff, constituting a backlash against women's political leadership more broadly. Presidents of Brazil regularly face intense scrutiny. Fernando Collor de Melo's 1992 impeachment proceedings (Villa, 2016) and Jair Bolsonaro's current confrontations (Hunter and Power, 2019) are just two examples. While Rousseff's presidency was riddled with issues, including one of the largest corruption scandals ever uncovered (Watts, 2017; Ellis, 2018) and a severe economic crisis (de Bolle, 2016; dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2021), the President's leadership style and abilities were scrutinized in distinct gendered ways, suggestive of backlash against women in politics.

Male dominated systems have slowly ceded women political rights, first with suffrage followed by formal and informal procedures solidifying women's rights to hold elected office (Towns, 2019). The modern political system has allowed for a gradual increase in the number of women in politics: as of 2021, women hold 25 percent of parliamentary positions worldwide, including 28 percent of women holding deputy speaker of parliament positions and 21 percent of speaker of the parliament positions (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). While gains have been constant since the second half of the twentieth century, these numbers are still disappointing given that women constitute roughly half of the world's population. The figures are more skewed when analyzing elected national executive positions. A mere 54 women have been elected to such posts in modern history, meaning the ratio of women elected to men is derisorily low (Reyes-Housholder, 2021). Even when including non-elected executive positions, far <10 percent of all presidents and prime ministers worldwide are women, which reinforces the masculine nature of this institution (Baturo and Gray, 2018; Jalalzai, 2019).

This research contributes to the growing literature on women in executive power worldwide (Genovese and Steckenrider, 2013; Jalalzai, 2013; Thames and Williams, 2013; Skard, 2014; Montecinos, 2017; Baturo and Gray, 2018; Wiltse and Hager, 2021) and in Latin America (Jalalzai, 2015; Reyes-Housholder, 2016, 2019; Waylen, 2016; Reyes-Housholder and Thomas, 2018; dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2021). Globally, numbers of women presidents and prime ministers have more than tripled since 1960, the first year a woman governed as a prime minister (Jalalzai, 2019). In Latin America, women started to make noticeable presidential gains; in 2010, four countries in the region had female presidents and all were elected by the popular vote (Jalalzai, 2015). The "wave" of women presidents in Latin America, however, proved short-lived. When Michelle Bachelet's second term in Chile ended in March 2018, no women

presidents remained. It was not until January 2022 that another (elected) woman served as president (Ernst, 2021).

By focusing on the gendered obstacles women confront once in power, this article expands the literature on women executives. Scholars have addressed conditions facilitating or obstructing women's ascensions such as institutional arrangements and structural factors (Jensen, 2008; Jalalzai, 2013; Lee, 2017; Baturo and Gray, 2018; Wiltse and Hager, 2021). Increasingly, explorations assess whether and how women prime ministers and presidents affect women's political empowerment as policy makers, cabinet selectors, and symbols (Jalalzai, 2015, 2019; Reyes-Housholder and Schwindt-Bayer, 2016; Adams, 2017; dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2021). We aim to contribute to the relatively understudied area of gendered perceptions and governance for women presidents.

Gendered double bind and misogynistic backlash

Given recent setbacks of women presidents including Park Geun-hye of South Korea and Dilma Rousseff, both impeached, scholars must better understand whether women face greater scrutiny for lackluster performances in their leadership capacities or alleged engagement in inappropriate behavior. Some evidence suggests that women executives indeed are judged more harshly. Carlin et al. (2019) find that women presidents are less popular and face more extreme approval changes than their male counterparts, especially in issues related to security and corruption. Reyes-Housholder (2019) provides confirmation that women presidents of Latin America encounter greater pressure to offer moral leadership, being viewed more negatively than their male colleagues in contexts of presidential scandal and executive corruption.

Our study extends research on the double-bind and misogynistic backlash women in politics face, specifically women presidents. The double bind "emerges when desirable traits require more investment or are associated with different burdens, for members of non-dominant groups" (Teele et al., 2018, p. 525). Manne (2018, p. 34) defines misogyny as "a system that polices, punishes, dominates, and condemns those women who are perceived as an enemy or threat to the patriarchy." Women challenging the status quo are punished for deviating from the prevailing norm.

The gendered double bind is a complex phenomenon that likely influenced the behavior of President Dilma Rousseff in distinct ways, including her attempts to *comply* with gendered assumptions of leadership and to *challenge* or defy these assumptions. In that context, the consequences of complying and challenging gendered assumptions led to very distinct reactions from political actors. Another theme connecting Rousseff's presidency to the gendered double bind was the constant *comparison* between her leadership (and leadership

style) to that of the men preceding and following her in the presidency, as well as comments about how Rousseff would have been treated differently if she was a man. In our thematic analysis we observed a pattern where comments relating Rousseff's challenge of gendered assumptions and those emphasizing the comparison of her leadership to that of men were followed by or included discussions about the backlash suffered by the President, overwhelmingly defined as misogyny or misogynistic acts against her.

Rousseff was not the only president who has endured the challenges of being a woman in a position of executive leadership. Other women presidents such as Michelle Bachelet, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Laura Chinchilla dealt with similar issues. One of the many challenges women presidents face is gaining a seat at the table in the first place. As Schwindt-Bayer puts it, "Women face a political environment long dominated by men in which it is difficult for women to break into the informal networks that underlie the power structure" (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010, p. 32). This makes it difficult for women to gain access to essential political resources and keeps them marginalized in the political world. Jalalzai expands on this stating, "executive power arrangements are masculine because they are centralized and hierarchical, making it difficult for women to break into these roles" (Jalalzai, 2010, p. 140). The structure of executive leadership positions itself hinders the ability of women to get positions of executive leadership, but this does not mean that women have not attempted to win executive elections. For example, by 2013 at least 38 women in 25 African countries had sought the presidency but only one was successful, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Jalalzai, 2013). As mentioned, in 2014, there were even four women presidents governing at the same time. Now in 2022, only one woman holds a presidential position in Latin America. The presidency has been a historically masculine office. Although more women are changing this narrative, this does not constitute a significant shift in roles and expectations. Electing a few women to the highest office "might be seen as achieving some cracks in the ceiling...to eliminate the glass ceiling completely will take much more than women reaching the highest office" (Cortès-Conde and Boxer, 2015, p. 65).

Societal gender dynamics dictate expectations for political leaders as well as understandings of leadership traits in politics and beyond. In any position, women must break down barriers and demonstrate their belonging (Ragins et al., 1998; Jalalzai, 2013; Baumann, 2017). Long established gendered logics determine professional expectations ascribing certain "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors as acceptable or unacceptable (Acker, 2012), normally placing ascribed positive masculine traits and behaviors as desirable leadership traits. The gendered institutions and norms shaping society, and more specifically, influencing our understandings of leadership, lead to distinct expectations for women (Jamieson, 1995). Individuals prefer leaders who possess stereotypically masculine "agentic" traits (such as assertiveness, confidence, forcefulness, dominance) rather than communal traits associated with women

(Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Koenig et al., 2011). When women demonstrate masculine traits, they face backlash for violating expected gendered behaviors (Jamieson, 1995; Rudman, 1998; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Valdini, 2019).

The national executive political space has been historically constructed for men and by men, evident by the lack of women as prime ministers and presidents (Jalalzai, 2013). Women's presence in political leadership creates a social role incongruency that impacts how individuals evaluate and react to a woman leader's performance (Rosette et al., 2015). Status incongruity describes the resistance individuals experience when they act contrary to social role expectations (Rudman et al., 2012). This can lead to a double bind. And while some evidence suggests that women in politics are not necessarily more likely to receive negative reactions due for displaying assertiveness (Brooks, 2011; Karl and Cormack, 2021; Hargrave and Blumenau, 2022), there is limited research on what happens when the national chief executive is a woman and displays such characteristics. These gendered assumptions about leadership traits place unique pressures on women, often putting them in an irreconcilable place in this rhetorical space where women's identity construct exists as only one of two alternatives: feminine or competent. "To be a woman (i.e., to have a womb) and to perform feminine qualities conflicts with the perceptions of competence" (Harp et al., 2016, p. 195). Power is attributed to men, meaning that to be a woman is to lack power. As Jamieson (1995, p. 14) states, the double bind is "constructed to deny women access to power and, where individuals manage to slip past their constraints, to undermine their exercise of whatever power they achieve." Women must then keep an "appropriate" attitude to be considered qualified enough to do their job. They carry the daunting task of acting somewhere between masculine and feminine, but it "is challenging and often at odds with women's identity and experienced conflicts between life and work" (Bierema, 2016, p. 119). Therefore, "every woman is the wrong woman" (Anderson, 2017, p. 132) because women cannot find the right balance to femininity and masculinity to be considered competent. "Women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent, and women who are competent, unfeminine" (Jamieson, 1995, p. 16).

Misogyny is a characteristic of social systems in which women face hostilities because they are women in a man's world and fail to live up to specific gendered standards (Manne, 2018, p. 34). Misogyny tends to be personal (i.e., targeting very specific women) but it is in its essence political, because it can be seen as an attempt to send a broader message that women as a group should have no part in the political process or should at least act in accordance with their expected gender roles (Krook, 2017, p. 75). Backlash against women in politics and specific cases of misogyny in the political arena can, therefore, be associated with attempts to increase women's empowerment.

The gender and politics literature has focused especially on the ways the gendered double bind and misogynistic backlash affect voter's perception of women politicians and the prospects

of women's election. Scholarship on women executives examines factors that may help or hinder women's ability to gain foothold as well. But what happens after a woman president gets elected? How do the double bind and gendered backlash affect a woman's ability to lead? To answer these questions, we focus on political actors' perceptions of the presidency of Brazil's first woman president, Dilma Rousseff. This is an important case study because Rousseff led a strong presidential system for 6 years, was democratically elected and re-elected, and was impeached and ultimately removed from her position. This means that Rousseff was able to transcend the obstacles women traditionally face but was forcibly removed from office, allowing us to analyze her rise and fall through gendered lenses.

Materials and methods

We use a thematic analysis of interviews with political actors in Brazil (for a detailed discussion, see the Appendix). Thematic analysis attempts to "arrive at an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it" (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 398). It facilitates identifying themes arising in interviews and others forms of data collection, providing a rich context to expand on complex concepts and recognize patterns that can strengthen conceptual and empirical discussions (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis captures nuanced concepts. The various steps in coding the data allow researchers to refine their approach and to find patterns and themes not previously identified. Here, we develop a thematic analysis focusing on the gendered double bind and backlash and then systematically follow best practices suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Terry et al. (2017). The interview data we use was originally collected in 2017 and 2018, transcribed (in Portuguese) and translated to English. A group of seven researchers (including all co-authors) worked in different stages of the project to develop a thematic analysis of 90 interviews (see Table 1 and Appendix). The profile of interview subjects (mostly women[2]) helps us identify themes related to the gendered double bind and backlash since the subjects themselves experience and think about the topic regularly. Using this data, the goal of the process is to develop a conceptualization and

qualitative measure/discussion of the gendered double bind and gendered backlash.

Part of the research team (two of the co-authors and one research assistant) spent the summer of 2019 exploring the literature on Dilma Rousseff's presidency and identifying possible themes related to Rousseff's leadership. While other themes stood out (Phase 3 on Table 1), the gendered double bind appears directly and indirectly throughout the interviews, while misogynistic backlash appears most times in connection and relation to the gendered double bind. Phase 4, conducted by three co-authors and one research assistant, involved identifying sentences and paragraphs connecting to a broad conceptualization of the gendered double bind and misogynistic backlash in a random sample of the interview dataset. Data strings broadly defining these concepts were analyzed for nuance inside these data strings. For Phase 5 the researchers (all of the co-authors) developed subcategories (or sub themes) present inside the previously coded data, using a consensus model to identify the subcategories present in all 90 interviews conducted.

The increasing familiarity with the interview data over various phases was vital to the analysis, as thematic analyses require researchers to deeply engage with data (Terry et al., 2017). Researchers first coded interview transcripts for the double bind and then reread quotes selected for the double bind to code for subcategories. The researchers' close work and immersion in the interview transcripts helped highlight the complexity of the gendered double bind and its connection to misogynistic backlash. The transition of focusing on themes initially selected, to the themes explored by three researchers (Phase 3 in Table 1) to finally the focus on subthemes of the gendered double bind (including misogynistic backlash) also highlights the importance of viewing analysis as a flexible and interpretative process as emphasized by thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017).

From gendered double bind to misogynistic backlash

Once they get a foot in the door, women still face various challenges in their positions. One of these is the gendered double bind. Because men have dominated presidencies, there are certain gendered expectations. The public often associates leadership with traits like aggression, competitiveness, dominance, and rationality. For women, it may be harder to demonstrate these qualities because constituents have specific expectations of men and women. More specifically, they tend to associate men with "masculine" traits and women with "feminine" traits. Male traits typically include the qualities envisioned with political leadership such as aggression, competition, dominance and rationality. Feminine traits typically include being more caring, compassionate, nurturing, and emotional. When women do demonstrate "masculine" traits, it has the potential to undermine their

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2 It is important to note that while most of our interviewees were women, not all fully supported president Rousseff. Interviews were conducted with journalists and academics who were critical of her government, and with politicians from the opposition. Moreover, as discussed in dos Santos and Jalalzai (2021) many of the women interviewed experienced a complex relationship with Rousseff and her administration: activists and political actors directly involved in the policymaking process were very critical of many of Rousseff's policies while emphasizing the role of misogyny and gendered backlash throughout her presidency and especially during the impeachment process.

TABLE 1   Thematic analysis—phases and best practices [Adapted from (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017)].

Thematic analysis phase	Best practices	Process
Phase 1: Data collection	Transcription of interviews (checking for accuracy)	Interviews professionally transcribed and translated
Phase 2: Generalizing initial codes	Code interesting features of data in systematic fashion, comprehensive coding	Coding of entire dataset developed by two of the co-authors while a research assistant read a sample of interviews looking for possible themes not addressed by the original researchers
Phase 3: Searching for themes	Collate codes into potential themes, gathering more relevant information	Themes identified: Double Bind, Backlash, Discussions about Leadership Style, Discussion of Competence/Incompetence. Ten interviews coded by one researcher
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	Checking how themes work in relation to coding extracts and entire dataset. Check themes against each other	Theme narrowed to focus on Gendered Double Bind and Backlash. Four researchers code interviews focusing solely on themes
Phase 5: Reviewing and naming themes	Defining and naming themes, generating clear definitions and names for each theme	Group of five researchers develop categories and relationships with the themes from Phase 4
Phase 6: Producing the report	Analysis of data, looking for coherence and logical interpretation (not just paraphrasing). Produce compelling narrative	Co-authors meet to discuss dataset consisting of four themes identified and cataloged (Phase 5) and develop narrative outlining the relationship between data

See Methodological Appendix.

leadership. Burns and Murdie explain, "women are perceived more negatively by the public for exhibiting the same behaviors as men. This means that women acting assertively violate gendered expectations and may be penalized more for this behavior" (Burns and Murdie, 2018, p. 473). Not only are women in positions of leadership viewed negatively for behaving in the same manner as men, but when they do behave the way they are expected to as a woman, they aren't seen as fit to lead. For example, "In her first campaign in 2005, Bachelet was routinely criticized for her more consensual approach to leadership that differed from an authoritative, directive style strongly associated with presidential power. Her opponents claimed that she simply was not "presidential" or lacked competence" (Schwindt-Bayer, 2018, p. 24).

The gendered double bind not only makes it difficult for women leaders to get a spot at the table in the first place, but it also creates challenges during their time in office, as evidenced by our findings. Rousseff had to navigate a political terrain that faulted her for acting too feminine. Yet, if she behaved in a masculine manner, she was labeled as harsh and overbearing. In some instances, the consequence of the double bind was misogynistic backlash targeting President Rousseff, a gendered backlash affecting women because of their gender identity.

Discussions about Rousseff's impeachment and the sexism and misogyny behind the process have been discussed in popular media (Hao, 2016; Hertzman, 2016; Romero and Kaiser, 2016) and in scholarly works (Zdebskyi et al., 2015; Cardoso and Souza, 2016; Santiago and Saliba, 2016; dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2021). In this work we will focus on misogyny as identified by our interviewees in the context of Rousseff's 6 years in power, specifically emphasizing the connection between misogynistic backlash and the gendered double bind dynamics identified. The themes identified in our analysis will serve as the driving points

for the remainder of this paper. In the following section we provide a more nuanced definition for each of the subcategories identified (see Table 2), providing stand-alone definitions and examples from the data combined with descriptive analyses of key moments in Rousseff's presidency that exemplify the dynamic between our nuanced proposal for analyzing the gendered double bind, misogynist backlash, and its consequence on Rousseff's presidency.

The four subcategories identified appeared in the data at varying levels (see Tables 3, 4). Two themes appeared in higher proportion: Comparison to Men and Misogyny. Comments themed as comparison to men appeared in almost half of all interviews and represented 36 percent of all comments codified. Comments themed as misogyny were the majority comments (38 percent) and appeared in 44 percent of all interviews. In other words, interviewees were most cognizant of Rousseff's role as president in comparison to other male politicians and former presidents, as well as the ways Rousseff was punished during her administration because of gendered expectation and backlash.

While appearing with less frequency in the interviews, the other two themes provide important context to understanding possible sexist backlash during the presidency of Brazil's first woman president. Discussions on how Rousseff attempted to comply with gendered expectations ascribed to women (Complying with the Double Bind) appeared in over 10 percent of the comment coded and interviews conducted. Meanwhile, discussion on how Rousseff challenged the gendered expectations of her position (Challenging the Double Bind) appeared in over one fifth of all interviews, constituting 16 percent of all comments coded.

The description of the numerical occurrence of the thematic analysis provides a starting point to a qualitative analysis of each theme, focusing on the connection between each theme,

TABLE 2 Gender double bind and the dynamics of backlash: from double bind to misogyny.

Double bind	"Desirable traits require more investment or are associated with different burdens, for members of non-dominant groups" (Teele et al., 2018, p. 525)
Gendered double bind	"Female leaders face two expectations: They must meet, first, their roles as leaders and, second, their roles as women... If they act in an assertive, dominant, and aggressive manner, they are being a good leader—but this also violates assumptions about them as women" (Burns and Murdie, 2018, p. 472)
Comparison to men	"Because, in fact, the idea that women when they arrive is as if they have to always prove something beyond what it would require of a man" (Respondent 33, July 26, 2017)
Compliance with double bind	"Anyway, right, Dilma in the electoral program, she was presented cooking, the grandson... again the very question of motherhood" (Respondent 9, July 9, 2017)
Challenging the double bind	"She did not need a man on the side to be legitimate as president of the Republic, because she takes power without being married, without having a man on her side" (Respondent 85, July 30, 2018)
Consequence of double bind Misogyny	"And I think that Dilma paid a very high price for being a woman. It is visible the disrespectful way the population treated her, a reasonable portion of the Brazilian population and the Brazilian elite treated her disrespectful" (Respondent 36, July 27, 2017)

especially the connection between the three themes directly related to the gendered double bind (comparison, complying, and challenging) and the misogynistic backlash that followed.

Comparison to men

One of the subcategories identified was comparisons of Dilma Rousseff to men, both comparing Rousseff to male political figures and describing how things would be different if Rousseff were a man. Thus, we found that there is both an abstract component and practical component to her comparison to men. In an abstract sense, we often saw the phrase, "if she were a man" to describe how a situation would have played out differently had Dilma not been a woman. The narrative portrayed in our interviews is of a system that "favors men" (Respondent 88, July 31, 2018), with "no open gender discrimination, but the fact that [a politician] is a man is a plus" (Respondent 8, July 5, 2017). When discussing this comparison more concretely, there is a focus on Rousseff's abrasive personality, the "tough woman around tender men." The quote below provides more context:

Yes, and they said that she was a hard person, that she could not talk to anyone, that she had an authoritarian way of speaking. Everything that for men appears as a compliment "no, he is a hard person, a self-confident person who knows what he wants." To her was presented as negative "no, she does not know how to talk, she is hard, she is this" in a negative way. How they talk to us, women. We have reached a certain position, we are being harsh, we are deviating from to how to be a woman, who is sweet, transparent, quiet and such. The form of Dilma being is the form of women who manage to be strong within a completely patriarchal world, facing this order that exists (Respondent 79, July 25, 2018).

Various interviewees also directly compared Rousseff to male political leaders. Some comparisons questioned the unfair treatment Rousseff received, especially in comparison to Michel Temer, the man who succeeded her in power. More interestingly, with Lula as her same party predecessor, comparisons between Rousseff and Lula were common and gendered in distinct ways. One interviewee says, "Lula was also charismatic, and she is not, and it was never required of her to fulfill this role, to be charismatic" (Respondent 3, June 30, 2017). Others state that "Lula was a political animal, he could have a Dilma in the center, more technical. Dilma was not this political animal, she had to have that political animal underneath and she did not have it" (Respondent 22, July 18, 2017). So, while comparisons between Rousseff and her successor (who was vilified by Rousseff supporters throughout) emphasized the double standard women face, comparisons between Rousseff and her predecessor subtly questioned Rousseff's political abilities, indicating that the gendered double bind affected even how her supporters viewed her leadership skills.

Complying with the double bind

Another theme that arose was how Rousseff complied with the double bind during her campaign and presidency. To gain popularity or appear more likable, Rousseff adopted a "Mother of Brazil" persona in the media (dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2014). During the campaign, the birth of her grandson allowed Rousseff's campaign to emphasize her motherly (and grandmotherly) role (mentioned in five interviews a total of thirteen times). But Rousseff also emphasized motherhood and gendered traits throughout her presidency. For example, in Mother's Day speeches, Rousseff emphasized the role of motherhood and motherly traits as essential to the development of the country (dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2014). Another interesting political moment was shared by an interviewee:

"I think sometimes she used the female condition in a positive way. When there was that Brazilian who was between life and death in Indonesia for drug trafficking, the

TABLE 3   Total comments and ratio.

	Comparison	Complying	Challenging	Misogyny	Total
Unique comments coded	67	19	30	72	188
Percentage of total comments %	36	10	16	38	100

TABLE 4   Comments in unique interviews.

	Comparison	Complying	Challenging	Misogyny	Total
Unique interviews	42	10	20	39	89
Percentage of all interviews %	47	11	22	44	100

guy was going to be executed and there was an appeal and she contacted the president of Indonesia and spoke: 'I appeal as president of the republic and as mother.' She tried to make a humanitarian appeal, but also of a woman, has a greater weight so. And at the same time, she used this condition of woman, but I think in that context was very appropriate, you try to sensitize a president of the republic as president and as mother has a greater weight" (Respondent 9, July 9, 2017).

While this was the least common category of analysis (see Tables 3, 4), complying with the double bind once again provides evidence of the impossible task for women executive leaders. Women must appeal to feminine traits and other gendered identities such as mother and grandmother but must do so in the context of a political role that requires leadership traits that undermine the importance of feminine traits and identities. In complying with the double bind, Rousseff, and arguably other women leaders, must navigate a difficult political landscape, emphasizing gendered roles when deemed (or calculated as) appropriate without letting go of masculine leadership traits. In other words, they must comply with gendered expectations even though their political role and their presence in this role fundamentally challenges the status quo.

Challenging the double bind

Although, at times, Rousseff chose to exhibit traditional feminine traits to avoid criticism, our analysis suggests she often went against these norms. The researchers identified passages where interviewees talked about Rousseff acting in ways that differed from traditional gendered (feminine) norms. These statements emphasize instances where Rousseff exhibited stereotypical masculine traits and/or did not follow traditional feminine expectations. Several interviewees emphasized Rousseff's career trajectory and personal life as transgressions to established gendered norms. For example, on the day of her inauguration, "She paraded in an open car with her daughter, without a man on his side, without a male figure. And an adult daughter, so it was not a child, it was a woman, a professional,

an adult daughter that did not depend on her" (Respondent 34, July 26, 2017). Rousseff's decision to participate in the parade broke away from a traditional family structure, instead showing her independence as a divorced mother, as a woman who does not need the help of a man. "It was not an image reinforcing the image of mother, it was reinforcing the image of woman, but I do not know how that was seen in the world" (Respondent 34, July 26, 2017).

Some interviewees explained how Rousseff's personality and style transgressed expected feminine traits and prevented her from connecting with other female political figures and women in general. One interviewee expressed this opinion: "women complained, for example, is that women could not talk to Dilma about her being a woman" (Respondent 21, July 17, 2017). Another interviewee expanded: "People didn't see Dilma as a woman because the way she presented herself, or in a meeting. She was a person who swears a lot (...). If she was in a meeting with other people, not just subordinates, anyone, she was swearing, you see all the time" (Respondent 87, July 31, 2018). Here the interviewee suggests Rousseff's swearing was more masculine, and that it was her choice to not appear as a woman. Although some of the interviews simply highlighted how Rousseff was "strong," "firm," or "hard," others seemed to criticize her inability to express female and maternal characteristics, such as being "caring" or "sensitive." Respondent 87 continued, "I am not blaming her for doing that, but by doing that I think she was not seen as a woman, like these caring or sensitive women, that was looking for children, as they would expect a woman would be. She was seen as this strong, actually even as not a polite person" (July 31, 2018).

Rousseff received criticism for choosing not to fulfill traditional feminine roles. Although these behaviors are acceptable for men, even the women we interviewed (including women who supported Rousseff) sometimes struggled with the interpretation of these transgressions: some saw Rousseff's transgressions as a negative aspect of her leadership style. "She was a woman alone, she was a woman without a man, without a husband. This was quietly used against her. When she was tough in the meetings, it was common to say: now she has PMS" (Respondent 63, July 19, 2018). The connection between

her arguably masculine leadership style to an age-old sexist trope regarding women's mental state and their menstrual cycle exemplify the kind of backlash that women can receive when transgressing/not complying with expected gendered traits.

Backlash: Misogyny as a consequence

Our thematic analysis emphasized three ways in which the gendered double bind influenced Rousseff's presidency: comparisons to men, compliance with gendered expectations, and challenging gendered expectations. We identified another themed related to the gendered double bind: the misogynistic backlash Rousseff endured during her presidency. The researchers coded for misogyny when passages discussed hatred for women and specific prejudice against Rousseff related to the fact that she is a woman. These references emphasize Rousseff being treated differently than her male counterparts, specifically in relation to being treated with disrespect, ridicule, and being dismissed because she is a woman. As one interviewee stated, "the fact that she was a woman was used against her" (Respondent 88, July 31, 2018).

We identified the misogyny theme, keeping in mind the conceptual and empirical debates surrounding the term today. We conceptualize misogyny as a "system that punishes, dominates, and condemns those women who are perceived as an enemy or threat to the patriarchy" (Manne, 2018, p. 34). The ways the system punishes, dominates, and condemns women varies, but the intent is to *put women in their place.* In the context of women in executive positions, the masculine and masculinist mature of presidencies across history implies a system that is overtly and covertly patriarchal, meaning that any attempt to transgress pre-established expectations based on gender identity is likely to be perceived as a threat to the "way the system works." Hence, in systems dominated by men such as executive politics, misogyny will work in overt and covert ways (see also Krook, 2020).

Our thematic analysis identified a connection between misogyny and two of the gendered double bind categories: comparison to men and challenging the double bind. In other words, when interviewees discussed these two aspects of the gendered double bind, most also identified a connection between them and misogynist responses toward President Rousseff.

In the two types of comparisons to men, the abstract and the practical, misogynistic outcomes followed different logics. When comparing Rousseff to men ("if she were a man") interviewees are alluding to the subtle misogynistic nature of politics, often emphasizing that Rousseff would be "punished" for actions and behaviors that would not warrant the same reactions if she was a man. When directly comparing Rousseff to other men, especially Lula, interviewees were often engaging in gendered rhetoric that ascribed to Lula (and other men) a kind of leadership that is seen as masculine and more competent/capable, while downplaying Rousseff's own leadership abilities. It is interesting to note that some of our subjects criticized the comparison to men in the abstract but would then participate in this gendered rhetoric ascribing to Lula (and other men) leadership traits that emphasize their ability to lead over Rousseff's own ability. For example, an interviewee stated: "Lula was a political animal (…) Dilma was not this political animal" Respondent 22, July 17, 2017). In other words, when comparing Rousseff to men and ascribing to these men "better" leadership qualities, subjects are at a minimum ascribing to subtly sexist narratives.

When addressing Rousseff's challenges to the gendered double bind, connections between them and misogyny were easily identified by our interviewees. This is especially present when connecting Rousseff's abrasive leadership style to the impeachment process. Rousseff's demanding leadership style established a clear transgression by the president toward the patriarchal structure: she dared to interrupt men, to yell at men, and to make decisions that went counter to what some of her allies and opposition believed were best for the country. As one interviewee put it, "men do not like being led by women. They can be led by a scumbag like Michel Temer, Aécio. But a woman may even be correct, but she will always be diminished" (Respondent 6, July 4, 2017). Rousseff's disregard toward the patriarchal structureled her to lose some support inside her own party and galvanized the opposition to pursue an impeachment process that had clear misogynistic elements into it, such as the *Tchau, Querida* (Goodbye, Dear) chants and constant questions about Rousseff's intelligence and appearance (dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2021).

In sum, our thematic analysis showed that the gendered double bind manifests itself in different ways, and that the consequences of such manifestations also differ. When Rousseff attempted to comply with the gendered double bind, our interviewees sometimes criticized her for doing so or argued that such compliance is part of the political process, but rarely connected such actions with an attempt to *put Rousseff in her place.* Conversely, discussions surrounding comparisons of Rousseff to men and examples of Rousseff rejecting or challenging the gendered double bind tended to link these actions with misogynistic responses to Rousseff's leadership.

Discussion

This article examined how the gendered double bind manifested itself in Dilma Rousseff's presidency. As the first woman president of Brazil, Rousseff's time in office provided an appropriate case study. Using a thematic analysis of interviews with political actors in Brazil, we discovered that the double bind resulted in Rousseff's comparison to men, Rousseff complying with the double bind to gain political support and Rousseff challenging the double bind. Throughout it all, Rousseff experienced misogyny as Brazil's first woman president. This

dynamic suggests that the gendered double bind is rooted in misogyny. While Rousseff may not have faced outright gender hostility in all aspects of her presidency, she had to navigate the political landscape in a way that men simply do not. She had to walk the fine line of being not too caring but not too firm, not too passive but not too decisive, not too quiet but not too loud. Like countless other female leaders, Dilma Rousseff had to work against the barrier that is the gendered double bind.

Although Rousseff overcame many barriers to become president in the male-dominated sector of politics, our findings suggest she continued to face challenges while in office. In fact, the gendered double bind likely influenced Rousseff's presidency in several ways. The subcategories of the gendered double bind illustrate the complexity to this phenomenon. The findings show how Rousseff faced many challenges because of her gender, as she both challenged assumptions of leadership, fulfilled typical female roles, and was continually compared to men. Furthermore, her competence as a political leader was repeatedly questioned while in office.

Due to this negative treatment from being a woman, another way Rousseff reacted to the criticism was by adhering to traditional feminine and maternal traits. In other instances the interviewees discussed show how she also chose to break away from female norms by displaying strength and independence from men. Rousseff's ability to both go against gender expectations, while also at times adhering to typical female traits, implies she recognized how her leadership was being negatively affected by the gendered double bind. It also implies that women must be flexible and respond in many ways to criticism to be successful. Rousseff's ultimate impeachment, however, may indicate that it is ultimately very difficult to overcome these criticisms.

Backlash against Rousseff that led to her impeachment ushered in an era of major policy setbacks for women. Programs that especially benefitted poor women that Rousseff expanded during her tenure were completely eradicated, unenforced or underfunded (dos Santos and Jalalzai, 2021). Levels of women in the cabinet had reached historical highs under Rousseff. When Michel Temer took over as president, he failed to appoint a single woman to the cabinet (Garcia-Navarro and Geo, 2016). His successor, Jair Bolsonaro's misogynistic rhetoric may have contributed to rising rates of violence against women (Lavinas and Correa, 2020). Backlash against an individual woman in power can lead to far-reaching negative impacts on women more broadly.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by PS, Luther College. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

FJ conducted some of the interviews and helped write text. PS conducted some of the interviews, helped write text, and helped code. BK, LM-P, and BS explored the literature on Dilma Rousseff's presidency and identified possible themes related to Rousseff's leadership and from the transcripts, identified sentences, and paragraphs to develop strings broadly defining these concepts and developed subcategories (or sub themes) present inside the previously coded data, using a consensus model to identify the subcategories present in all 90 interviews conducted. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.926579/full#supplementary-material

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A long way to liberalization, or is it? Public perceptions of women empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa

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This paper explores the question of what explains public opinion of women empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa. Muslim societies have often been accused of conservatism toward empowerment, stripping women of equal access to education and opportunities. However, many predominantly Muslim societies in the MENA region seem to be on the way to implement change to provide women with more rights. Prior research points to exposure to diversity as a contributor to the acceptance of a more egalitarian role of women in society. This article analyzes different mechanisms of the exposure hypothesis and whether they contribute to predicting positive public perceptions of women empowerment in the region. The empirical analyses rely on public opinion data collected by the Arab Barometer in 2018−19. The descriptive findings suggest attitudinal differences across countries, but also significant gender gaps and divergences across core explanatory factors found under the umbrella of the exposure hypothesis, such as diverse urban living, keeping religion a private matter, and connecting with the world via social media. These factors seem important to shift people's minds and to pave women's long way to liberalization.

Introduction

A decade after the Arab uprisings, the "euphoria of the [Arab] Spring" (Moghadam, 2014, p. 137) seems to have vanished. While initially praised to be an upheaval of change, especially in the light of improving women empowerment across the region, most demands in this respect have hardly been met (e.g., Glas and Spierings, 2020).

Despite the mass presence of women in revolutionary efforts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the twentieth century, including the Arab Spring, women remain excluded from the center of power (e.g., Moghadam, 2010, 2014; Bayat, 2013; Sadiqi, 2020). This represents a central dilemma for countries' democratization efforts but also for women around the globe: States experiencing advances in women's rights and political participation are more likely to transition and consolidate as democracies, as modernizing women are found to be among the main advocates and agents of democratization (see e.g., Moghadam, 2010, 2014, 2018). This is possible because notable advances in education, paid employment, and political representation have been achieved for women globally and specifically in the MENA region over the past decade (e.g., Walby, 2003; Seguino, 2007; Feather, 2020). Yet, further strengthening of the rights and roles of women seems necessary to put them into a more equal position, moving beyond establishing economic growth (Kabeer and Natali, 2013) or ensuring equal legal rights (Robbins and Thomas, 2018). Empowerment may start in people's minds, as public perceptions of the rights and roles of women in society a critical element of disentangling women empowerment in the region (Thomas, 2019). It is thus important to regularly monitor public perceptions toward women empowerment.

Using data from the Arab Barometer collected in 2018–2019, this article explores factors that may shift public perceptions of women's rights and roles to enable women empowerment in the region. The MENA region has been ascribed relative public support for women's social and political rights despite some cross-country differences (Coffé and Dilli, 2015; Robbins and Thomas, 2018; Thomas, 2019). However, Muslim societies have also been found to be substantively less supportive of gender equality compared to other cultural contexts (e.g., Norris and Inglehart, 2011; Tausch and Heshmati, 2016).

We examine whether *exposure* to diverse and liberal views may have a positive effect on opinions on women empowerment, outlining various mechanisms including education, employment, urban living, secularization, and the use of social media (e.g., Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Kroska and Elman, 2009; Thijs et al., 2019; Kitterød and Nadim, 2020). As such, we take stock of public perceptions of women's roles and rights in the MENA region and empirically investigate crucial mechanisms of the exposure hypothesis.

The article is structured as follows: We begin with theoretically defining women empowerment for this paper, linking the literature to challenges of operationalization. Next, we review factors that influence perceptions of women empowerment and discuss the exposure hypothesis and its mechanisms. We present our data and methods before reporting the results of our analysis. The article closes with a discussion of our findings, their implications for future research, and a critical evaluation of our study.

Women empowerment: Definitions and measurement

Alexander et al. (2016, p. 432) posit that "a theoretically driven definition of [. . .] empowerment does not exist". This appears to be the dominant finding in prior research describing empowerment as a buzzword or fuzzy concept (e.g., Kabeer, 1999; Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Batliwala, 2007; Mandal, 2013; Alexander et al., 2016; Cornwall, 2016) with an almost organically changing scope.

In simple words, empowerment refers to people's ability to make choices and gain control over their lives (Kabeer, 1999). In turn, these abilities should enable them to act on issues that they deem important to improve their lives, communities, and society (e.g., Mandal, 2013). As such, the idea of empowerment touches on multiple dimensions of life, including (but not exclusive to) social, political, and economic aspects (e.g., Kabeer, 1999; Mandal, 2013; Alexander et al., 2016). Many definitions of empowerment have derived from the development literature. Alexander et al. (2016) argue that the broadest view and most comprehensive approach has been proposed by the World Bank in which Malhotra et al. (2002) suggests that empowerment entails a process of change from a condition of disempowerment to that of agency and choice. This summarizes the view of Kabeer (1999) who maintains that, at a minimum, empowerment describes people's ability to make choices related to the available resources, taking agency in decision-making, and making prospective contributions, or achievements. These definitions therefore take an operationalist point of view allowing development agencies to evaluate empowerment at the macro-level.

This article focuses on public perceptions and argues that change begins in people's minds. Cornwall (2016) notes that the concept of empowerment traditionally referred to grassroots efforts to address unequal and unfair power dynamics. This corresponds with our conceptualization of empowerment. Following Cornwall (2016), we use the term empowerment to describe public perceptions of people's core rights and roles in society and to disentangle potential unjust power relations at that end. When we speak about perceptions of empowerment, we thus indicate public views on the rights and roles that enable people (in this case women) to live their lives by making their own free life choices and exercising control over their lives.

Adding "women" to the equation seems to further complicate a theoretical approximation of a definition of women empowerment. Malhotra and Schuler (2005, p. 72) point out that researchers often use women empowerment synonymous with related concepts, such as gender equality, women's status, and female autonomy. When we add women to our definition of perceptions of empowerment, we refer to public views on the rights and roles of women in society. We acknowledge that women empowerment encompasses some unique features, following Malhotra et al. (2002, p. 5), who suggest that women

represent a cross-cutting category of individuals which overlaps with many other groups with protected characteristics, such as race. Further, women might be disempowered by gatekeepers who can be found within their own families, which *may* not apply in the same way for other disadvantaged groups.

Prior research finds that global, political women empowerment needs to be regarded in a triage of elite actors exercising authority; civil society actors challenging and engaging with these elites; and citizens formally engaging and participating in politics, to implement change (Alexander et al., 2016). Thus, to empower women, scholars indicate that systemic transformation of institutions that support patriarchal structures is required (Malhotra et al., 2002; see also Seguino, 2007; Moghadam, 2010; Kabeer and Natali, 2013; Kabeer, 2016). While our article follows this view, its starting point is different, as we propose that investigating public views on women empowerment—which should be foundational to reforming systemic characteristics that may foster patriarchal structures—is essential.

The absence of a clear definition of empowerment pushes scholars to take an operationalist point of view depending on the research at hand. While hard indicators of women empowerment are scarce, previous work has predominantly relied on public opinion data to measure whether citizens perceive women to have certain rights in various areas of life. For instance, scholars have frequently employed survey questions by the World Values Survey (WVS) on women's social and political rights, focusing on their role in politics, society, and the household. Norris and Inglehart (2011) utilize the WVS's Gender Equality Scale combining a battery of five items with ordinal agreement scales[1]. Following principal component analysis to empirically establish whether these questions speak to similar underlying concepts, they propose an additive index of women's equality.

Employing the same data set, Seguino (2007) expanded on the number of questions analyzed but distinguished the gender equality items from social attitudes unspecific to gender. Empirically, the analysis treats each survey question in isolation from the others and investigates potential attitudinal changes across time. Her work shows that women have gained more opportunities across the globe. However, it also indicates that women are—as one would anticipate—more supportive of women's rights compared to men.

A comparable approach is followed by Robbins and Thomas (2018) and Thomas (2019) who examine data collected by

the Arab Barometer for MENA countries. Both studies also find that women are more supportive of their own agency compared to men. In addition, Thomas (2019) also presents aggregate descriptive data across time and disentangles further dimensions beyond differences in perceptions across women and men, including age, education, and urbanity. While support for women's rights has seemingly increased across the region[2], she observes country differences as well as disparities across the different break variables. For instance, for many individual questions, better educated respondents and those living in urban areas appear to hold more liberal views.

Relying on WVS data, Feather (2020) explores perceptions of four individual dimensions of women empowerment descriptively, distinguishing women's personal legal empowerment from their social, economic, and political empowerment. As a proxy, each dimension is measured by an individual survey question[3].

Moving beyond operationalizing perceptions of women empowerment by individual survey questions or presenting them as an additive index, Glas and Spierings (2020) apply Latent Class Analysis (LCA) on data from the Arab Barometer and WVS to empirically establish types of feminists across the MENA region. While analytically this might be a superior modeling approach, merging different data sets and using repeated cross-section over time may pose other challenges to the data analysis strategy.

All approaches are valid but take a slightly different angle on women empowerment. Individual questions allow tackling various issues but not a broader concept of empowerment, while an additive index allows predicting broader dimensions of women empowerment. LCA again takes a slightly different approach by defining groups of feminists. As our goal is to understand public perceptions toward the broader concept of women empowerment, we opt for an additive index which we discuss in more detail in the methods section.

One potential problem repeatedly described by scholars of the MENA region is the frequency with which ongoing projects ask the same questions in the surveys (e.g., Seguino, 2007; Thomas, 2019; Glas and Spierings, 2020). Funded projects may not be able to survey in the same number of countries or in regular time intervals. It is also noteworthy that asking some questions may be inappropriate in some country contexts at a

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1 These questions ask as to whether respondents agree or disagree with statement prompting that men are better political leaders; if men should be prioritized on the job marked when jobs are scarce; if university education is more important for men than women; whether women need to have children to be fulfilled; and whether they approved of single women bringing up children.

2 However, the overall numbers reported are not directly comparable given that a different set of countries from the region participated across the years (Thomas, 2019).

3 Personal legal empowerment: "It is justifiable for a man to beat his wife"; social empowerment: "University education is more important for a man than a woman"; economic empowerment: "when jobs are scarce men should have priority for a job"; political empowerment: "Men make better political leaders" (Feather, 2020).

particular point in time, resulting in incomplete data in repeated cross-sections and / or time series[4,5].

The variety of measures applied to capture perceptions of women empowerment re-emphasizes the importance and clarity of definitions. However, it also demonstrates that scholarship aims to better conceptualize and operationalize women empowerment.

Determinants of public perceptions of women empowerment

Women around the globe, but especially those in contexts that do not classify as WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich et al., 2010a,b), face a continuous struggle for empowerment. Even though clarifications in the legal status of females as well as the mobilization of women specifically have helped shape the nature of the uprisings in various contexts (Moghadam, 2018), only few countries managed to maintain the momentum. Scholars have observed limits to the progress of women empowerment, especially in the MENA region following the Arab Spring (Glas and Spierings, 2020).

To understand the mechanism of women empowerment, it is thus important to be aware that the contextual influences on individuals' attitudes, serve as a strong determinant of individuals' perceptions on indicators of women empowerment,

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4   Thinking about the region studied, it should also be mentioned that many contexts are non-democratic, which poses challenges to the survey infrastructure but also raises the question who collects the data and what administrative hurdles and control governments may have during the approval process, i.e., asking projects to remove certain questions for political reasons.

5   A related issue is the accuracy with which women's rights questions can be measured in a survey environment. Certain questions, e.g., personal questions, may be prone to misreporting (Tourangeau et al., 2000; Krumpal, 2013) especially given potential underlying gatekeeper challenges within the household. Moreover, respondents may perceive any evaluative task that is not a traditional survey question as suspicious. Furthermore, countries in the global South may not have the capacity to implement such tests sufficiently, given potential ongoing interstate conflicts and/or underdeveloped infrastructures. Moreover, linking potential survey data might induce bias in samples if sub-populations of the intended sample systematically drop out affecting the representativeness of the study. To circumvent this issue, Nillesen et al. (2021) suggest moving away from observational survey data capturing *explicit* attitudes toward measuring *implicit* attitudes on women empowerment in the MENA region by employing so-called Implicit Attitude Tests (e.g., Ksiazkiewicz and Hedrick, 2013). While measuring implicit attitudes may reduce risks of misreporting, as the measures are based on affect, other problems may influence the accuracy of measurement.

given prevailing norms at the societal level (e.g., Kitterød and Nadim, 2020). We thus begin by putting women empowerment into context before moving on to discussing individual level mechanisms.

Contextual explanations: Modernization and societal values

In understanding diverse attitudes on gender equality, Inglehart (2020; see also Inglehart and Baker, 2000) identifies forces of modernization, including economic security, urbanization, mass education, occupational specialization, and expansions in technology and communication, as explaining diminishing differences in the perception of gender roles across contemporary societies. These developments reflect an increase in rationalization, bureaucratization, worldview pluralism, and the differentiation of religion and traditional authority from social and political institutions (Kasselstrand et al., 2023). As such, modernization processes are believed to drive pervasive global patterns of social and cultural changes, including secularization (e.g., Wilson, 1982; Bruce, 2002; Kasselstrand, 2019), democratization (e.g., Inglehart and Welzel, 2009), and a shift from a materialist focus on survival to values of self-expression (Inglehart et al., 2003).

Regarding gender, Inglehart (2020, p. 8) notes that patterns persist across diverse sociocultural and geographical contexts and explains that "the sharply contrasting gender roles that characterize all preindustrial societies almost inevitably give way to increasingly similar gender roles in advanced industrial society." In essence, women empowerment has increased around the globe in two stages of modernization: First, industrialization is accompanied by rising female labor force participation and increasing educational opportunities for women (see also Kabeer and Natali, 2013). Second, women access managerial, high-status positions, and attain political power during a post-industrial phase, which a majority of the countries in the world have yet to reach (Inglehart et al., 2003; see also Seguino, 2007).

Although modernization drives changes in gender equality, other contextual factors intervene in this process. For example, a country's religious background accounts for a larger proportion of the variation in gender equality than its level of development (Welzel et al., 2002). Muslim majority countries have been found to be the least supportive of gender equality (e.g., Norris and Inglehart, 2011) and it has been argued that women empowerment is strongly interrelated with the rejection of Muslim traditions (Tausch and Heshmati, 2016). According to Inglehart et al. (2003, p. 71), "[i]slamic religious heritage is one of the most powerful barriers to the rising tide of gender equality." However, observations from the Western world demonstrate that religious influence in societal power structures is not limited to Muslim majority countries. The issue of abortion in

Ireland, Poland, and most recently the United States, serves as one example. It is therefore important to recognize that economic development alone is not sufficient to create positive conditions for women empowerment. Although the rejection of traditional forms of authority and the differentiation of religion from power structures and social and political institutions usually accompanies other indicators of modernization, such as economic growth and urbanization, it is not always the case.

While these contextual-level factors shape the environment in which individuals find themselves, it is beyond the scope of this article to investigate them in depth. The goal is rather to disentangle individual-level explanations of public perceptions of women empowerment, acknowledging the continuum in which they exist.

Individual explanations: The exposure hypothesis

The importance of religious liberalism, women's education and employment, and urban living on shaping liberal views on gender equality has often been framed through the lenses of *exposure* and *interest* (e.g., Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Thijs et al., 2019): Gender egalitarian attitudes are either shaped by people's exposure to diverse worldviews through socialization or in response to individual interest. The latter indicates that people tend to hold more liberal views when it is in their best interest to do so. This perspective is often employed to describe why women are more likely to hold gender egalitarian views than men (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Kroska and Elman, 2009; Thijs et al., 2019; Kitterød and Nadim, 2020). The former assumes that those frequently exposed to diversity will adopt more egalitarian values. This article focuses on exposure rather than interest, following the notion that encountering and engaging with others who may hold more positive attitudes on women empowerment is essential in understanding how such views are shaped.

H1: Exposure to diverse world views increases the likelihood of positive public perceptions of women empowerment.

Below we identify different mechanisms by which exposure to diversity may influence public perceptions of women empowerment. We summarize these in Table 1 along with their anticipated effect and provide more detailed discussions in the following.

In many Arab countries, the urban population has multiplied by two or three in the last half of the twentieth century (Chaaban, 2009), demonstrating that urban living is more attractive, especially to young people given the prospects of better educational and employment opportunities. In line with the modernization argument at the macro-level (Inglehart

TABLE 1 Mechanisms of the exposure hypothesis.

Dimension	Mechanism	Anticipated effect
Urbanity	Urban living in global communities increases exposure to social, political, and economic diversity and thus will generate positive perceptions of women empowerment.	+
Employment	Employment increases exposure to economic liberalism and thus fosters liberal views on women's labor force participation, which in turn may help improve public perceptions of women empowerment in general.	+
Education	Education enhances critical reflection of traditions and enables people to engage with others and to be curious and passionate about different views. As such, it increases exposure to and engagement with social, political, and economic liberalism and thus improves public perceptions of women empowerment.	+
Religious liberalism	Secularization and religious liberalism have been found to be directly related to women's rights and roles. As such, liberal religious views increase public perceptions of women empowerment.	+
Social media usage	Social media further enable exchange with people and represents even higher engagement with social, political, and economic liberalism in a secure and largely anonymous environment and thus improves public perceptions of women empowerment.	+

and Baker, 2000; Inglehart and Welzel, 2009; Inglehart, 2020), urban living should coincide with a cultural shift at a faster pace. Furthermore, at the individual level, the exposure argument may apply given the more diverse world views encountered in an urban as opposed to a rural setting (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004): Urban living may expose women and men to well-educated, liberal, working women, where they interact, engage, and exchange ideas with each other, potentially leading to more liberal views on women empowerment (see Table 1, row 1).

Previous research has found a clear relationship between education and feminist views (e.g., Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Auletto et al., 2017; Kyoore and Sulemana, 2019). Thijs et al. (2019, p. 597) explain that "education has a liberalizing influence, transmitting ideas about diversity and equality, countering gender stereotypes, and increasing individuals' openness to alternative perspectives on the roles of women and men in the public and private spheres." In other words, education is an avenue through which people encounter diverse and non-traditional worldviews. Education may be an especially

powerful explanation in the formation of attitudes about gender equality, as individuals are particularly impressionable and open to re-evaluate their position on a variety of social and political issues during late adolescence and early adulthood (Krosnick and Alwin, 1989; Thijs et al., 2019). In their study of the MENA region, Auletto et al. (2017) find that it is the completion of secondary education specifically that serves as an important determinant of gender egalitarian views, arguing that further investment in education should be made (see Table 1, row 2).

Another means by which the exposure hypothesis applies is through employment in the paid workforce (Rhodebeck, 1996; Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Kitterød and Nadim, 2020). Working women—and men for that matter—who are interacting with others, including women, in a work context may gradually perceive change and adopt a more liberal view on the role and position of women in society. They may also be engaged in interactions with business partners around the globe, where gender equality may be further ahead, exposing them to views and behaviors that affect shifts in their attitudes toward women in general (see Table 1, row 3).

Furthermore, and coinciding with a macro picture, are arguments about the role of religion. Prior research has shown that MENA countries remain among the least secularized in the world (e.g., Eller, 2010; Kasselstrand et al., 2023). Religious people tend to hold more traditional or patriarchal views on gender issues (Zuckerman, 2009; Schnabel, 2016), a pattern that remains particularly strong among Muslims (Alexander and Welzel, 2011). Being raised religious and within a MENA context that overall tends to be characterized by strong religious authority thus exposes people to more traditional gender roles. Nonetheless, recent trends of secularization in the region can be observed (Abbott et al., 2017; Maleki and Tamimi Arab, 2020). Less than half of youth identify as religious in the countries surveyed by the Arab Barometer, ranging from 15 percent in Algeria to 42 percent in Iraq (Raz, 2019). In Iran, 60 percent do not pray regularly, two-thirds want separation between the state and religion, and more than a third drink alcohol (Maleki and Tamimi Arab, 2020). The above discussion suggests that the religion may be central to studying women empowerment (see Table 1, row 4).

The exposure argument may also apply to participation in online communities. The Internet is a unique and largely anonymous space for sharing and encountering views that deviate from mainstream societal norms. While this seems obvious, it is important to note that this offers opportunities in the MENA region, where traditional media are often subject to state control (Al-Saggaf, 2006; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). Thorsen and Sreedharan (2019, p. 1125) explain:

> "[t]he Internet enables people to do online what they cannot do offline [...] In this context, the online public spaces that have emerged in Arab countries could be seen as examples of counter-publics, where women have been able

to articulate political views [...] Such activism features a lack of institutional and cultural norms: it is bodiless, which enables women to choose their identities, to express and write about marginalization and to challenge the system of patriarchy."

Providing evidence of the impact of Internet activism and the online public sphere, Al-Saggaf and Weckert (2005) found that an online Saudi community devoted to political discussion had a clear effect on the social and political environment more broadly. Moreover, the Internet, and social media, in particular, have been instrumental in driving public action, not the least in relation to the Arab Spring (Salvatore, 2013). Online outputs have also shifted from primarily being written in English to a foreign, often Western audience, toward Arabs engaging on social media in their own language (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019), extending the possibility of online communication driving public opinion in the MENA region. In line with this, Moghadam (2019) observed that, especially for women, political engagement and participation has expanded with developments in communication, such as access to the Internet and social media, within and across countries (see Table 1, row 5).

Prior research on the Arab Spring also proposed that the youth were disproportionately more likely to participate in protest action during the Arab Spring ascribing them more liberal stance on empowerment in general (e.g., Hoffman and Jamal, 2012; Mulderig, 2013; Abbott et al., 2017). However, others warned that that it would be a mistake to characterize the protests as dominated by young users of the Internet and social media (Abbott et al., 2017)[6].

Following the argument of the exposure hypothesis, i.e., diverse worldviews have a liberalizing effect on opinions on gender equality, this study postulates that there is a positive relationship between education, employment, social media usage, religious liberalism, and urban living with public perceptions on women empowerment. Our research systematically examines how these mechanisms might simultaneously affect perceptions of women's roles and rights. As such, it is our goal to provide a more comprehensive overview of the drivers of women empowerment in the MENA region a decade after the Arab uprisings.

Data and methods

To investigate attitudes toward women empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa, the analyses rely on cross-sectional data collected by the Arab Barometer (2019). The project conducted public opinion surveys based on random

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6 While we do not present a specific mechanism for age in Table 1, we consider age in our empirical tests.

probability samples in 11 countries[7] in the Middle East and North Africa (Total $n = 25,407$)[8]. The surveys were fielded using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) between September 2018 and January 2019. For security reasons, some of the interviews had to be conducted using interviewer-assisted Paper and Pencil Interviewing (PAPI). This concerns the full sample in Yemen ($n = 2,400$), interviews in the Gaza Strip in Palestine ($n = 972$), and the Kurdish areas in Iraq ($n = 120$). The response rates varied by country from 45.1 percent in Tunisia to 89.0 percent in Palestine. Whenever possible and suggested by the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Response Rate I was calculated[9].

Dependent variable

The questionnaire asked various questions on politics and society in the region, including a battery on women's political and social rights. The dependent variable is a standardized additive index of women's rights in the MENA region based on six questions that capture: (1) Support for a women's quota in elections; (2) acceptance of women as state leaders; (3) equal rights for women to make the decision to divorce; (4) rejection of the assumption that men are better political leaders; (5) rejection of the statement that men's education is more important than that of women, and (6) that husbands always having the final say in the household. All items were measured on a 4-point (dis-)agreement scale and recoded into binary variables, where 1 indicated the more liberal outcome and 0 the more conservative one[10]. Subsequently, an additive index was created

and standardized to a range from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate more liberal views on perceived women empowerment.

Independent variables

One core explanatory variable predicting public perception toward women empowerment is religious liberalism. The Arab Barometer asked a series of questions about attitudes toward involvement of Islam in the political sphere including (1) whether or not religious leaders should not interfere with elections; (2) religious practice should be a private matter; (3) Islam does not require women to wear a hijab; (4) the country is better off with religious leaders in government; (5) Religious leaders should interfere with government decisions; and (6) that non-Muslims rights should be inferior to those of Muslims[11]. Similar to the women empowerment index, we recoded these items into dichotomous variables, where 1 indicated the liberal and 0 the conservative view on political Islam. Next, we created an additive index of the six items and standardized it to range from 0 to 1. Higher values indicate a higher level of religious liberalism.

As an indicator of connectedness with the global world, we employ two variables that focus on online participation. The Arab Barometer asked respondents how many hours they spent on social media utilizing an ordinal scale. We recoded the variable in a way that we end up with a dichotomous measure that is equal to 0 if the respondent reported that they do not use social media (0 hours per day), and 1 if they reported using social media daily (up to two hours or more). As the social media question was filtered on a survey item capturing whether or not people use the Internet and as such excluded all respondents who reported they never use the Internet, we also coded these respondents as 0 (=do not use social media as they are also not using the Internet).

The second social media indicator is the number of social media channels (NSMC) the respondents reported using. Overall, the survey captured whether people mentioned Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, or Snapchat. We added up these items, so that our recoded measure indicates how many of these social media channels respondents employ. The overall range of our variable is 0–7, where 0 indicates they use none of these seven social media channels and 7 that they use all of these.

In addition, we account for the employment status, capturing whether respondents are employed (=1) or not

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7   In alphabetical order: Algeria ($n = 2,332$), Egypt ($n = 2,400$), Iraq ($n = 2,462$), Jordan ($n = 2,400$), Lebanon ($n = 2,400$), Libya ($n = 1,962$), Morocco ($n = 2,400$), Palestine ($n = 2,493$), Sudan ($n = 1,758$), Tunisia ($n = 2,400$), Yemen ($n = 2,400$).

8   For detailed information about the Arab Barometer, see www.arabbarometer.org (accessed April 29, 2020).

9   For detailed information on response rates, see Methodology Report provided on the Arab Barometer's webpage: https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABV_Methods_Report-1.pdf accessed May 27, 2022).

10   For some items (strong) agreement in the battery indicated the more liberal outcome (Q601A: "Some people think in order to achieve fairer representation a certain percentage of elected positions should be set aside for women"; Q601_1: "A woman can become President/Prime Minister of a Muslim country"; Q601_14: "Women and men should have equal rights in making the decision to divorce". As a result, we collapsed (strong) agreement as 1 (liberal) and (strong) disagreement as 0 (conservative). For other items (strong) agreement in the battery indicated the more conservative outcome (Q601_3: "In general, men are better at political leadership than women"; Q601_4: "University education for males is more important than university education for females"; Q601_18: "Husbands should have the final say in all decision concerning the

family"). Consequently, we collapsed (strong) disagreement as 1(liberal) and (strong) agreement as 0 (conservative).

11   As these questions were only asked of Muslims, we restricted the analysis to the Muslim population. Overall, 93 percent of the sample population self-identify as Muslim, only 6 percent as Christians, the remaining one percent as other.

(=0); where the respondents live, i.e., in urban (=1) or rural environments (=0)[12]; respondents' self-reported level of education (primary=0, secondary=1, or higher=2); their age in years; and their gender (women = 1; men = 0)[13].

To avoid potential multicollinearity problems, we explored correlations of all indicators. The correlation coefficients displayed weak, but statistically significant associations.

Analysis strategy

We begin by presenting some descriptive results, looking at the mean scores on the perceptions of women empowerment measure by country as well as by gender; urbanity; education; employment; religious liberalism; and social media usage. Next, we estimate a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions starting with the sociodemographic model, and subsequently adding all explanatory variables individually. This allows us to observe any changes in the explained variance for each of the independent variables. We calculate clustered standard errors accounting for the intragroup correlation by country. All analyses presented apply poststratification weights by country provided by the Arab Barometer[14].

Descriptive results: Patterns of women empowerment in the MENA region

Overall, the population across the MENA region is relatively supportive of women empowerment, with more than half falling above the average score of 59.0[15]. However, there is noteworthy cross-country variation. Figure 1 plots the mean score of perceived women empowerment by country, with higher scores indicating more liberal views. On average, the Sudanese ($\bar{x} = 48.3$) score lowest on the perception of women

FIGURE 1
Mean perception of women empowerment in the MENA region by country. Weighted estimates.
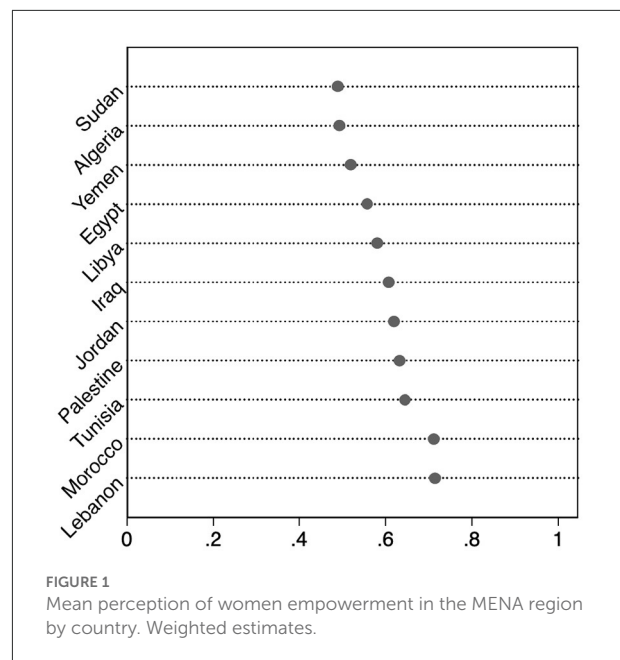
empowerment index, while the Lebanese appear to have the most liberal views on women empowerment ($\bar{x} = 68.5$).

Some variation in views on women empowerment may be due to other factors, such as gender; urban living; education; employment status; religious liberalism[16]; or social media usage. Figure 2 thus plots the mean score of perceptions of women empowerment across countries by these features.

The top left graph presents the differences in average scores on women empowerment by gender. Unsurprisingly, we observe statistically significantly higher support for women empowerment among women compared with men across countries[17]. The largest differences can be observed in Egypt ($\Delta_{xw-xm} = -0.23$, $t = -21.23$, df = 1,986; p-value < 0.01), the smallest difference in Iraq ($\Delta_{xw-xm} = -0.07$, $t = -8.05$, df = 2,345; p-value < 0.01).

Looking at the variation by urbanity (top right graph), the picture painted is more diverse: In most countries, there is no statistically significant difference between urban and rural locations in the average score on women empowerment, with the exception of Morocco ($\Delta_{xu-xr} = -0.09$, $t = -6.32$, df = 1,568; p-value < 0.01), Egypt ($\Delta_{xu-xr} = -0.05$, $t = -4.54$, df = 1,986; p-value < 0.01), and Sudan ($\Delta_{xu-xr} = -0.03$, $t = -2.22$, df = 1,662; p-value < 0.05), where those in urban areas

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12   The original variable also included respondents interviewed in refugee camps in Palestine (total $n = 2,493$), as the classification of these into urban and rural areas is unclear, we decided to drop these respondents ($n = 270$) from the analysis.

13   We also produced models that included a variable capturing whether or not respondents are form an above- or below-median income household. Due to severe loss in case numbers in addition to the fact that we did not hypothesize an effect of this variable, it was excluded in the final models.

14   The weights were calculated for each country. Base weight is the household size. Weights were calculated on the basis of age, gender, region, and − if applicable − religious sect. The latter was the case in Lebanon.

15   We dichotomized the women empowerment index at its mean to calculate this weighted estimate.

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16   Note that the religious liberalism index was dichotomized to create Figures 1, 2. In order to achieve this, the index was split at its mean: Values below the average score indicate religious conservatism; values above the average score religious liberalism.

17   T-tests by country rejected the null hypothesis of the t-statistic that the means scores by gender are the same. The results can be provided upon request.
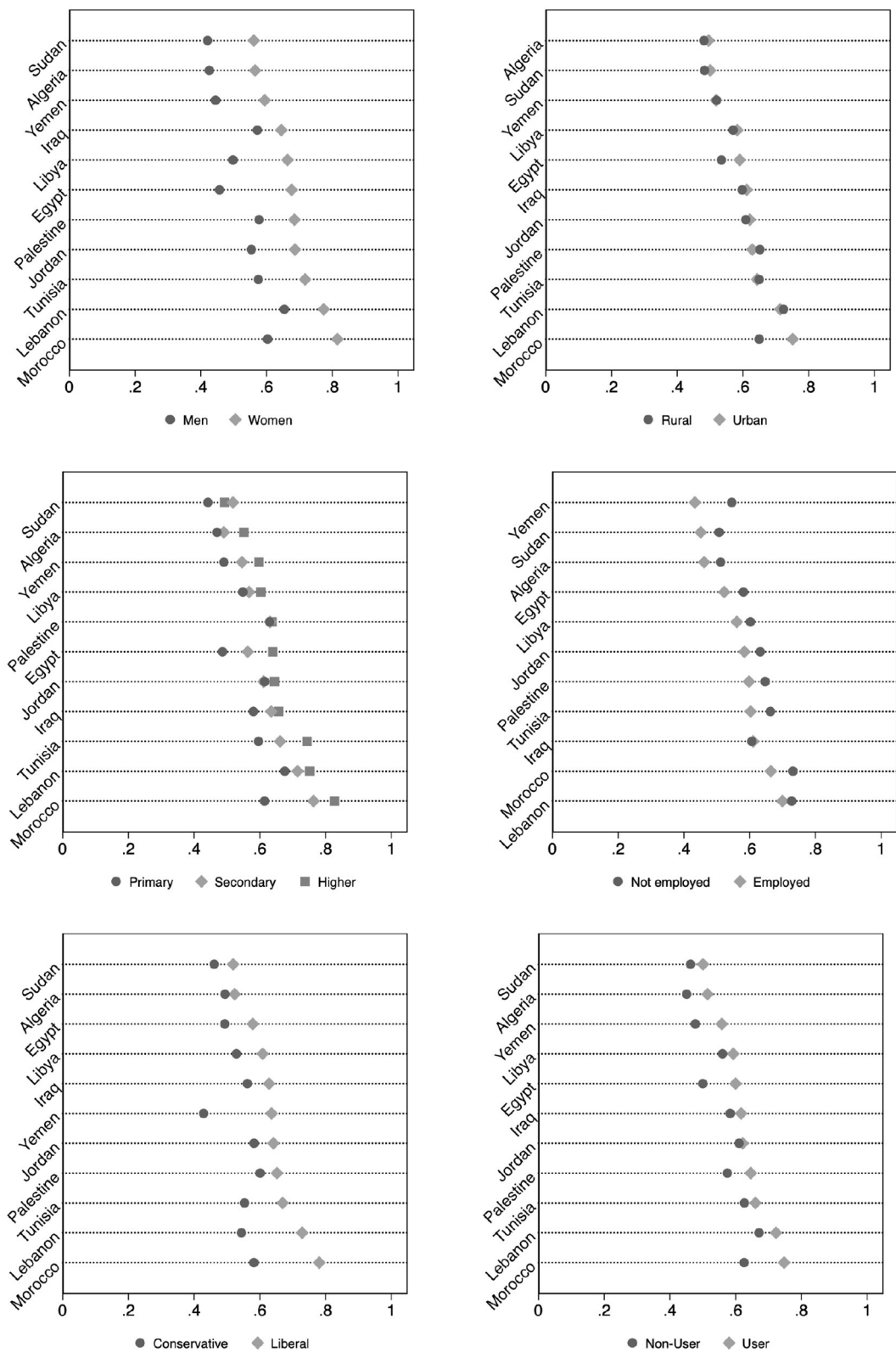
FIGURE 2
Mean perception of women empowerment in the MENA region by gender, urbanity, education, employment status, religious liberalism, and social media usage. Estimates weighted.

are statistically significantly more likely to display more liberal views on women empowerment.

The general patterns for educational attainment are presented on the left-hand side in the middle row of Figure 2. It suggests that those with higher educational levels score higher on the women empowerment index, compared to those with primary and secondary education. The exceptions are Sudan, where those with secondary education seem to score higher compared to those with higher education, and Palestine, where no visible difference in average mean scores on women empowerment can be observed[18].

The graph on the right in the middle row shows the patterns for employment status. The findings indicate statistically significant group differences across those employed vs. those not employed in all country contexts but Iraq. The largest difference can be observed in Yemen ($\Delta_{\bar{x}e-\bar{x}ne} = 0.07$, $t = 4.91$, df $= 2{,}252$; p-value < 0.05) and Sudan ($\Delta_{\bar{x}e-\bar{x}ne} = 0.07$, $t = 4.74$, df $= 1{,}637$; p-value < 0.01).

The bottom left graph displays the differences in mean perceptions on women empowerment by religious liberalism. It is noteworthy that those with more liberal views on the relationship between religion and the state are also statistically significantly more likely to score higher on the women empowerment index. The biggest differences can be observed in Yemen ($\Delta_{\bar{x}rl-\bar{x}rc} = -0.20$, $t = -16.08$, df $= 2{,}130$; p-value $<$ 0.01), Morocco ($\Delta_{\bar{x}rl-\bar{x}rc} = -0.19$, $t = -11.38$, df $= 1{,}074$; p-value < 0.01), and Lebanon ($\Delta_{\bar{x}rl-\bar{x}rc} = -0.19$, $t = -11.71$, df $= 2{,}204$; p-value < 0.01). The smallest, yet statistically significant differences, are seen in Egypt ($\Delta_{\bar{x}rl-\bar{x}rc} = -0.05$, $t = -3.86$, df $= 1{,}581$; p-value < 0.01) and Algeria ($\Delta_{\bar{x}rl-\bar{x}rc} = -0.05$, $t = -4.37$, df $= 1{,}628$; p-value < 0.01).

Finally, the bottom graph on the right displays the patterns across social media usage. The analysis suggests statistically significant group differences except in Jordan. The biggest differences can be observed in Morocco ($\Delta_{\bar{x}smu-\bar{x}smnu} = -0.13$, $t = -8.57$, df $= 1{,}511$; p-value < 0.01) and Yemen ($\Delta_{\bar{x}smu-\bar{x}smnu} = -0.13$, df $= 2{,}229$; p-value < 0.01); the smallest, yet statistically significant difference in Iraq ($\Delta_{\bar{x}smu-\bar{x}smnu} = -0.03$, $t = -3.05$, df $= 2{,}333$; p-value < 0.01).

In sum, the descriptive results presented above seem to give a first indication that some of the mechanisms discussed in the literature review may indeed be relevant to predict perceptions of women empowerment in the MENA region.

Inferential results: Predicting perceived women empowerment in the MENA region

Next, we estimated a series of models to test our hypotheses in a multiple regression environment. To recap, we begin with a

socio-demographic model accounting for intragroup clustering by country calculating clustered standard errors. We do not present a graph for this model. We then add our explanatory variables testing the urbanity, employment, religious liberalism, and social media arguments step-by-step. The full modeling process is documented in Supplementary Table A1.

The top left graph of Figure 3 displays coefficients of the socio-demographic model plus urbanity, suggesting that women, better educated, and individuals who live in urban areas tend to be more likely to hold more positive views on women empowerment. We do not identify an age effect.

The top right graph tests the employment argument. While the patterns identified in the previous model hold, the results do not display an employment effect as we had hypothesized.

The graph on the left-hand side in the middle row of Figure 3 adds the indicator for religious liberalism and displays a strong, positive impact on perceived women empowerment, holding all other variables constant. All other effects hold with small differences in the strength of the coefficients.

The graph on the right-hand side in the middle row of Figure 3 adds the first variable on social media usage to the equation. We make one important observation here: All but one previous relationship seems to hold when adding this variable, i.e., that of urbanity.

Admittedly, urban living only displayed a small positive impact at the 0.1-level of statistical significance. However, it appears that this is absorbed by adding the social media usage variable. We may carefully argue that the digital age allows those living in rural and urban areas to be exposed to the interconnected world, so perhaps where people live is no longer that important for the development of liberal attitudes.

We now turn to the bottom row of Figure 3, where the left graph adds the NSMC used to our regression model. We find a positive and statistically significant impact of NSMC on women empowerment. We make further observations here: The education effects seem to change somewhat. While the strength of both secondary and higher education in comparison to primary education remain similar to the previous models, the level of statistical significance drops to 90%. Further, we observe that the social media usage variable loses in strength and significance as well. It remains relevant with 90% confidence.

Our final model includes an interactive term between NSMC and gender, as the literature review pointed to the increased usage of social media by women to provide a safe and potentially anonymous way to express themselves (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). Indeed, we do find a positive effect of the interactive term, suggesting that engaging in multiple social media channels has a stronger effect on liberal views for women than it does for men. Moreover, the individual effects remain. This supports the argument above. All other patterns identified in the previous model hold.

We plot the marginal effect of the interactive term with 95%-confidence intervals in Figure 4, following the advice by Brambor et al. (2006) to visually inspect the multiplicative term.

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18   Detailed results of the *t*-tests when testing each of the educational dimensions against the other two can be provided upon request.
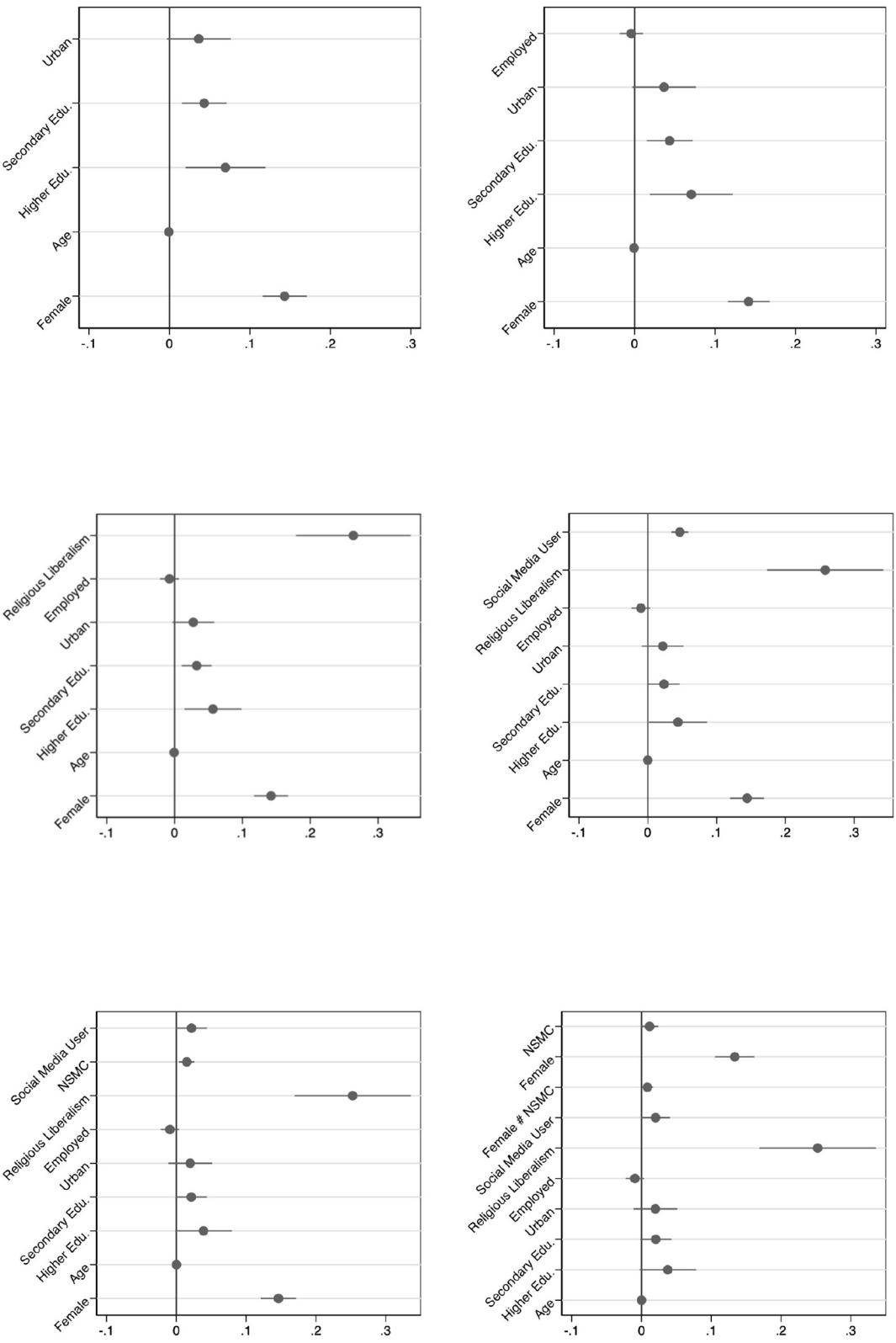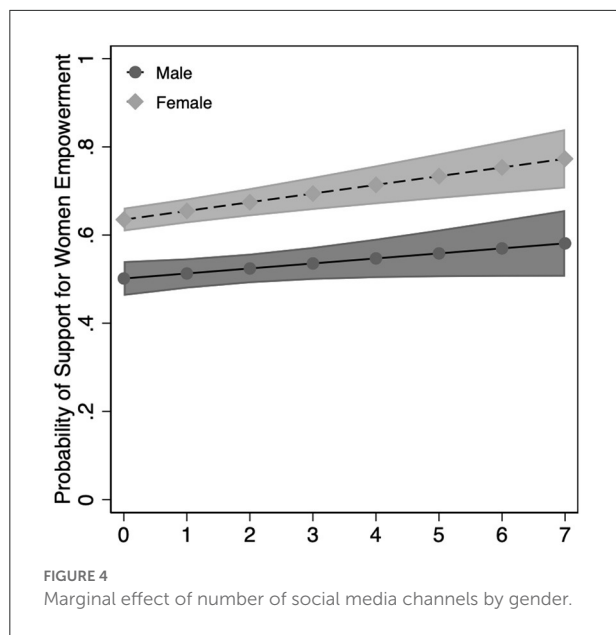
FIGURE 3
Coefficient plot of predictors of women empowerment in the MENA region. Whiskers represent 95%-confidence intervals. Estimates weighted.

FIGURE 4
Marginal effect of number of social media channels by gender.

The plot shows that for both women and men the probability of more liberal views on women empowerment increases the more social media channels they use. Further, we observe that the level of support for women empowerment for women and men is different throughout. As the confidence intervals for the line for women and men are not overlapping, we conclude that the statistically significant effect applies for the full scale of social media channels. This is in line with the suggestion that Moghadam (2019) makes about engagement, especially that of women, having expanded across counties. We interpret this as support for the social media mechanism of the exposure hypothesis, where more exposure to the diverse information should improve people's support for more egalitarian rights. Given the higher level for women in general, we would expect the level for women to be higher than for men, which the Figure 4 suggests[19].

Discussion and conclusion

This article took stock of public perceptions of women empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa and studied mechanisms underlying the exposure hypothesis positing that exposure to diverse world views will have a liberalizing effect on public perceptions of women's rights and roles. Acknowledging the challenges in defining and measuring "true" empowerment of women, we conceptualize perceptions of women empowerment as self-reported attitudes toward questions of women's rights and roles. We argue that

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19   We also tested the multiplicative term of gender and social media usage, which did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

empowerment starts in people's minds and that more egalitarian views on women's rights and roles will be central to enabling women to make their own choice and take control over their own lives.

The article focuses on a region that struggles with the stigma of fostering and protecting patriarchal structures, which is often ascribed to prevalent conservative religious beliefs (Inglehart et al., 2003; Alexander and Welzel, 2011; Tausch and Heshmati, 2016). By analyzing data collected by the Arab Barometer in 2018–19, we were able to simultaneously test which mechanisms are at play for the wider region while controlling for country clustering in the data.

Empirically, we find that public perceptions on women empowerment show some indications toward liberalization. On average, Arab publics hold a relatively positive view on women empowerment. However, there is still a leeway for improvement, as we observe substantive cross-country variation, in line with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Coffé and Dilli, 2015). Exposure to diverse worldviews especially via the Internet and social media and by separating religious traditions and potential resulting constrains from social and political lives may contribute to more liberalization (see also Zuckerman, 2009; Alexander and Welzel, 2011; Schnabel, 2016; Tausch and Heshmati, 2016). We also find some support for the pathway of educational attainment, following the previous literature on the impact of education (e.g., Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Auletto et al., 2017; Kyoore and Sulemana, 2019). While we identify that urban living is also a predictor of more liberal views on women empowerment, it appears that digitalization replaces its impact. When testing the exposure argument of the digital world, looking at social media usage and the number of channels used, the effect of urban living seems to be absorbed by these variables supporting previous claims proposing that digitalization provides women with a new anonymous avenue for activism (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). However, contrary to arguments made about exposure through employment (e.g., Rhodebeck, 1996; Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Kitterød and Nadim, 2020), we do not find that being employed has an impact on perceptions of women empowerment.

Overall, we find some support for the exposure hypothesis with the exception of employment and urbanity—at least once controlling for social media usage. This support is evident in three core mechanisms: education, religious liberalism, and social media usage. Public opinion is more susceptible to positive views on women empowerment for individuals displaying a higher educational attainment, more liberal views on religion, and frequent engagement on social media using a variety of different channels. These findings may help policy makers, charities, and the international community to optimize their campaigns to shift people's minds, suggesting that access to education, revisiting of religious traditions, and well-placed social media campaigns may help to address empowerment issues.

Our research has some limitations: Taking stock at one particular point in time does not allow us to systematically track the shifts in public opinion over time. As many scholars have pointed out before, the field lacks high-quality time-series data of questions tapping into the same dimensions of women empowerment (e.g., Feather, 2020; Glas and Spierings, 2020). Many projects only infrequently ask the same item in batteries on the role of women in society and politics. We also acknowledge the difficulty of asking about some items in public opinion surveys. For instance, it is almost impossible to capture freedom of violence or even attitudes about violence accurately and effectively given the sensitivity of this issue (see e.g., Kabeer, 2016). Moreover, our study focuses on self-reported exposure through education, employment, lifestyle choices, and social media use. However, one question remains unattended too, that is how contextual effects influence public perceptions. For instance, macro-indicators of human development, globalization, but also institutions (see e.g., Coffé and Dilli, 2015, testing contextual effects on participation in Muslim countries). Future research may also wish to further explore what kinds of information individuals have *actually* been exposed to by linking data on specific media content to public opinion data (Weaver et al., 2019; Horvath et al., 2022).

While public perceptions across the MENA region seem to have shifted toward a positive view on women empowerment, the ambitious research agenda into women's rights and roles and diverse findings are also indications that it is still a long way to liberalization and gender equality in the region. We conclude that exposure to diverse views should contribute to further strengthen women in this region on their pathway to empowerment.

Data availability statement

Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found here: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/.

Ethics statement

Neither ethical review and approval nor written consent to participate in the study were required, given the research employed secondary data. This is in accordance with the local and institutional requirements.

Author contributions

KT: idea and analysis. KT and IK: theoretical framework, design, manuscript draft, and final approval of the article. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.984310/full#supplementary-material

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Masculinity, sexism and populist radical right support

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Introduction: The gender gap in populist radical right voting—with women being less likely to support populist radical right parties than men—is well-established. Much less is known about the interplay between gender, masculinity and populist radical right voting. This study investigates the extent to which masculinity affects women and men's likelihood of supporting populist radical right parties. Focusing on sexism as a link between masculinity and populist radical right support, we put forward two mechanisms that operate at once: a mediating effect of sexism (sexism explains the association between masculinity and populist radical right voting) and a moderating effect of sexism (the impact of masculinity is stronger among citizens scoring high on sexism compared with citizens with low levels of sexist attitudes).

Methods: We draw on an original dataset collected in Spain at the end of 2020 to investigate support for the Spanish populist radical right party VOX.

Results: We find support for hypothesized mechanisms, mediation and moderation, chiefly among men. First, sexism explains about half of the link between masculinity and populist radical right support for this group, confirming the hypothesized mediation effect. Second, masculinity has a significantly stronger impact on the likelihood of supporting VOX among men scoring high on sexism, which in turn substantiates the presence of a moderation effect.

Discussion: Existing research so far has examined the empirical connections between how individuals perceive their levels of masculinity, sexism, and PRR voting separately. Our study offers a first step in unpacking the relationship between masculinity and PRR support by focusing specifically on how sexism relates to both these variables.

Introduction

It has become a well-documented finding that women are less likely to support populist radical right (PRR) parties although interesting differences between countries have been mapped (e.g., Givens, 2004; Gidengil et al., 2005; Fontana et al., 2006; Rippeyoung, 2007; Immerzeel et al., 2015; Spierings and Zaslove, 2015; Coffé, 2018; Harteveld and Ivarsflaten, 2018; Weeks et al., 2023). This literature suffers from two compounding challenges. First, the bulk of scholarly contributions draw on a binary measure of gender: comparing women with men. Such binary measures of gender ignore the fluid, dynamic and individual ways in which gender identity can be expressed. Second, studies investigating the gender gap in PRR support mostly focus on women's underrepresentation among the PRR electorate, explaining why women are less inclined than men to support these parties. Much less attention has been paid to the reverse side of the coin, namely men's overrepresentation

among PRR voters and the causal mechanisms at play, which we hypothesize involves an interplay of hypermasculinity with sexism. This paper seeks to overcome these two intertwined challenges.

First, binary measures of gender carry the implicit and unrealistic assumption of group homogeneity. Recent research in both gender studies and political behavior highlight the need to break up these overly general binary measures and suggest to also include gender identity traits that reveal much more interesting and fine-grained differences (Bittner and Goodyear-Grant, 2017; Alexander et al., 2021a). This paper builds on advances made in recent literature by investigating to what extent and how masculinity—rather than conventional binary measures—impacts support for PRR parties. This approach allows us to provide novel, more nuanced insights into the interplay between gender and PRR voting.

Second, an emerging handful of studies uncovered an association between masculinity and support for PRR parties, showing that people subjectively ascribing to masculine characteristics are more likely to support PRR parties (e.g., Coffé, 2019; Gidengil and Stolle, 2021; Ralph-Morrow, 2022). Explanations for this relationship invoke, for example, the masculine character of PRR parties and their discourse, and a reaction to perceived threats to traditional masculinity. Little research has been in a position to offer a detailed empirical test explaining why masculinity relates to support for PRR parties. To fill this gap, we will not also examine the link between masculinity and PRR support, but also investigate *why* masculinity increases the likelihood of supporting PRR parties, zeroing on the role played by sexism between identities and vote choice. Sexism penalizes women who break with gendered traditional norms and understands men and women's relationship as competitive and a zero-sum game, whereby if women gain power, it is at men's expense. As such attitudes are more common among those reporting masculine traits—men in particular—and given the rhetoric against "gender ideology" deployed by many PRR parties (Cabezas, 2022), we expect sexist attitudes to operate between masculinity and support for PRR parties. We expect to see two mechanisms: a mediation effect (sexism explains at least part of the association between masculinity and support for VOX) and a moderation effect (sexism strengthens the relationship between masculinity and support for VOX).

In sum, the two main research questions motivating our study are: (1) to what extent does masculinity affect women and men's likelihood of supporting PRR parties? And, (2) to what extent is this link related to sexism? Given the visible backlashes against "gender ideology", partly driven by the discourse of PRR parties and their growing electoral success in many countries around the globe (Cabezas, 2022), we are facing a critical moment to capture the interplay between gender, gender identity, sexist attitudes and support for PRR parties. To answer our research questions, we draw on an original online survey collected in December 2020 among a sample of Spanish citizens that resembles the Spanish voting age population (Fraile, 2023). Support for the PRR is measured by declared probabilities of voting for VOX. While the extent to which VOX is a populist party is a matter of ongoing discussion (e.g., Ferreira, 2019), the party shares many characteristics typical of the contemporary European PRR party family and has been labeled as such by researchers (e.g., Gould, 2019; Alonso and Espinosa-Fajardo, 2021; Rama et al., 2021). VOX thus offers a suitable and

likely generalizable testing ground for theories looking into the electorates and success of populist radical right parties.

Our findings show that masculinity increases the likelihood of supporting VOX, yet this mechanism only holds among men, who also tend to score higher on masculinity than women. Our analyses further suggest that the association between masculinity and vote choice can be explained by sexism through two different paths: mediating and moderating. First, sexism explains about half of the link between masculinity and PRR support among men, revealing a significant mediation effect. Second, masculinity has a significantly stronger impact on the likelihood of supporting the PRR among more sexist men, also confirming the presence of a moderation effect. Our findings have important implications to unpack the complex empirical connection between gender, gender traits and the success of PRR parties.

Gender, masculinity and populist radical right support

There is a rising consensus among scholars that PRR parties have a distinctive gender specific profile: men are overrepresented among the PRR electorate (Givens, 2004; Gidengil et al., 2005; Fontana et al., 2006; Rippeyoung, 2007; Spierings and Zaslove, 2015; Coffé, 2018; Harteveld and Ivarsflaten, 2018).[1] A more limited amount of scholarship has recently moved beyond the binary measure of gender and investigated the connection between femininity, masculinity and PRR voting (e.g., Coffé, 2019; Gidengil and Stolle, 2021; Ralph-Morrow, 2022). Pleck (1975, p. 164) defines masculinity and femininity measures as indications of "the extent to which the individual shows gender-appropriate traits, attitudes, and interests". Masculinity is generally described as "adaptive-instrumental" and "assertive-dominant", while femininity is more "integrative-expressive" and depicts "nurtureness-interpersonal warmth" (Bem, 1981; Williams and Best, 1982). While most would agree on these descriptions of masculinity and femininity in contemporary, Western societies, they are socially constructed and time and culture dependent (Connell, 2005). Moreover, while masculinity and femininity are often labeled in opposition to one another, with feminine being "not masculine" and masculine being "not feminine" (Foushee et al., 1979), they can be better understood as multidimensional concepts that vary independently (Bem, 1974).

While femininity has been found to have little effect on the likelihood to support PRR parties, masculinity is associated with higher support for these parties (e.g., Coffé, 2019; Gidengil and Stolle, 2021). Those scoring high on masculinity tend to be more likely to support PRR parties compared with those scoring low on masculinity. Smirnova (2018, p. 11) even conjectured that "associating with and voting for Trump thus becomes coded as an act of masculinity—not voting for him reflects one's lack of masculinity or brotherhood". The link between masculinity and PRR voting has been attributed to the masculine character and discourse of PRR parties and their leaders. Carian and Sobotka (2018), highlight how Trump embodied an exaggerated form of

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1   While most agree on the gender gap in PRR support, some interesting cross-national differences have been found (Immerzeel et al., 2015; Weeks et al., 2023).

masculinity that appeals to hypermasculine white men. Similarly, Daddow and Hertner's (2021) framework of toxic masculinity in political parties reveals that the policy positions, discourses and practices of UKIP and the AfD are toxically masculine, perhaps even specifically geared to be attractive to masculine voters. Furthermore, and particularly relevant for our study, Cabezas (2022) has shown VOX's use of masculinist frames, frames based on masculine threat and frames that construct feminism as the nation's enemy and harmful to men through a comprehensive analysis of VOX's communication strategies in electoral campaigns in Spain.

Scholars have also related the "masculine threat"— the fear among some men that they will lose their dominant position in society—to support for PRR parties. Willer et al. (2013), for example, put to the test "the masculine overcompensation thesis" which asserts that men react to masculinity threats with extreme demonstrations of masculinity in order to recover traditional masculine status, both in their own and others' eyes. While Willer et al. (2013) do not directly connect it to PRR support, they show an association between masculinity threats and support for war, homophobic attitudes, a desire to advance in dominance hierarchies, and a belief in male superiority.

PRR parties' narrative claim that all manner of "others" are replacing men in power and focused on masculinity. Daddow and Hertner (2021) illustrate this with the example of AfD's leader of the state Thuringia, Björn Höcke, who said at a party rally in November 2015: "We need to rediscover our masculinity. Because only if we rediscover our masculinity do we become manful. And only if we become manful, do we become fortified, and we need to become fortified, dear friends". Given PRR parties' tendency to catalyze (men) majority anxieties (Gökariksel et al., 2019), we may expect masculine threats to relate to PRR support. Carian and Sobotka (2018) operationalized masculinity as a threat to men's employment and confirmed that it indirectly influenced Trump support. Gidengil and Stolle (2021) highlight the notion of threat as an explanation for the association between masculinity and support for Trump, though do not provide an empirical test of the explanation, but convincingly substantiate an empirical link between masculinity and Trump support. In addition, Cabezas' (2022) study of VOX offers examples of instances where the party advocates for a masculinist reinterpretation of the law on gender violence or funding of feminist organizations as discriminatory of men. As such, the party offers an attractive discourse for those scoring high on masculinity.

Based on the limited available literature and theories on masculinity and PRR parties, our first hypothesis reads:

> H1: Masculinity will increase the likelihood of supporting populist radical right parties.

While both women and men can score high on masculinity, biological sex and masculinity characteristics are intrinsically related. As a result of gender socialization forces, men generally score higher on masculinity than women (Coffé, 2019; Alexander et al., 2021b). Some literature has suggested that it is particularly masculine men who support the PRR, assuming a reinforcing effect between masculinity and being a man. The concept of "hypermasculine men" refers to men who are not just masculine and not just male (Mosher and Tomkins, 1988, p. 64). Hypermasculine men exhibit an exaggerated form of masculinity,

engage in stereotypical masculine behavior, and see themselves as possessing a high level of stereotypical masculine characteristics (Gidengil and Stolle, 2021, p. 1819). They also typically fear the feminization of society and are most likely to be susceptible to masculine threats. Studying the Dutch Freedom Party, Coffé (2019) did not find a stronger effect of masculinity among men compared with women. By contrast, Gidengil and Stolle (2021) confirmed a tendency of hypermasculine men to be especially attracted to Trump.

Referring to the theory of "precarious manhood", DiMuccio and Knowles (2021) conclude that men who are anxious about their levels of masculinity—that is, men high in precarious manhood—attempt to affirm their status as "real men" and are more likely to support aggressive political policies and Donald Trump, and more generally embrace policies and politicians that signal strength and toughness.

In light of the literature on hypermasculine men and their support for PPR parties, the hypothesis related to the interaction between gender and masculinity, and PRR voting reads as follows:

> H2: Masculinity will be more likely to increase men's likelihood of supporting populist radical right parties than women's.

Sexism, masculinity and populist radical right support

Several recent studies document the existence of an empirical connection between how individuals perceive their levels of masculinity and PRR voting (Coffé, 2019; Gidengil and Stolle, 2021; Ralph-Morrow, 2022). Yet, little scholarship has been able to explain this link beyond explicit party messaging. While masculine threat has been evoked as a factor, we do not know exactly by which explanatory mechanisms this might occur. Our study offers a first step in unpacking the relationship between masculinity and PRR support by focusing specifically on how sexism relates to both these variables. Defined as seeking "to justify male power, traditional gender roles, and men's exploitation of women as sexual objects through derogatory characterizations of women" (Glick and Fiske, 1997, p. 121), (hostile) sexism is targeted at women who break with gendered traditional norms. Sexism casts men and women's relationship as competitive and a zero-sum game, whereby if women gain power, it is at men's expense.

While masculinity and sexism are linked, scholarship has treated these concepts as analytically distinct as they have different targets (Glick et al., 2015; Barreto and Doyle, 2022): Masculinity pertains to how people perceive themselves, their identity. Sexism, on the other hand, is a negative evaluation aimed at others, in the case at hand, women as a group. We anticipate sexism to affect the link between masculinity and PRR support in two ways: through mediation (sexism explains the link between masculinity and PRR voting) and through moderation (the impact of masculinity is stronger among more sexist citizens compared with less hostile sexist citizens).

Mediation effect

Recent scholarship has uncovered an empirical connection between different forms of gender traditionalism and support for the PRR, even after controlling for rival explanations. Ratliff et al. (2019), for instance, suggest that those with hostile sexist attitudes are more likely to vote for PRR candidates, like Trump. The U.S. based literature looking at the role of hostile sexism and vote choice for Trump is, however, heavily shaped by the presence of a woman candidate who was the direct target of a backlash against women who seek power, which is one of the hallmarks of hostile sexism (Schaffner et al., 2018; Valentino et al., 2018; Cassese and Holman, 2019; Winter, 2022). Outside the US context, the literature draws on party rhetoric rather than candidate traits. Off (2023), for example, finds that the salience of liberalizing gender values may trigger a backlash that fuels PRR voting in Sweden.

To explain the link between masculinity and PRR support, scholars have referred to the populist voices contesting the equal participation of men and women in society under the auspices of a "war on gender ideology" (Graff, 2014; Cabezas, 2022). The anti-feminist rhetoric of PRR parties gives voice to the societal changes to the role of women that threaten the traditional male or masculine order. Cabezas' (2022) comprehensive analysis of VOX's communication strategies in electoral campaigns shows that in its efforts to mobilize voters, the party routinely deploys frames activating threats to masculinity threat as well as frames depicting feminism as the nation's enemy and harmful to men: a clear link between masculinity and sexist attitudes in attempts to mobilize voters. In addition to party rhetoric, an explanation for the link between masculinity and PRR support may be attitudinal: individuals displaying a strong attachment to masculinity traits are attracted by PRR parties because they see the world in sexist terms and hold sexist attitudes. Maass et al. (2003) revealed that men subject to threat inductions display more hostility toward women. Burkley et al. (2016, p. 120) have also shown that conformity to masculine norms is associated with hostile sexism among men. They find that men whose self-worth is affected by threat to their masculinity correlates with hostile sexist attitudes.

Those with masculine identities feel threatened by the erosion of traditional roles. One possible response to this is, as Burkley et al. (2016) suggest, an increase in sexist attitudes. In turn, sexist attitudes increase support for PRR parties. Although Burkley et al. (2016) focus on hegemonic masculinity (acceptance of masculine dominance in society), Vescio and Schermerhorn (2021) show that sexist attitudes, when combined with self-expressed masculinity, increased support for Trump. Gidengil and Stolle (2021) suggest that the more (white) men identify themselves as masculine, the more susceptible they are to masculine threat, which—in its turn—increases the likelihood of supporting Trump. While they do not directly test sexism as a mechanism behind the link between masculinity and support for Trump, they do show that masculinity relates to sexism, which they consider as an indicator of feelings of masculinity threat.

In sum, considering the PRR parties' discourse against "gender ideology," and the links found in previous research between masculinity and PRR voting as well as masculinity and sexism, we can formulate the following hypotheses related to the expected mediation effect:

H3: The link between masculinity and supporting populist radical right parties can be (at least partially) explained by sexism.
H3a: The mediating effect of sexism on the link between masculinity and support populist radical right parties (H3) will hold particularly among men.

Moderation effect

In addition to a mediation effect, we also explore whether sexism moderates the relationship between masculinity and PRR support. The idea here is that besides sexism explaining the process through which masculinity is related to supporting a PRR party (as a mediator), sexism may also affect the strength of the association between masculinity and supporting the PRR. In other words, besides sexism working as the belief system through which higher masculinity leads to voting for the PRR, it is also plausible that sexism affects the extent to which higher masculinity leads to voting for VOX. Whereas, Gidengil and Stolle (2021) might suggest that sexism is a result of threats to masculinity where masculinity increases sexism, it is also possible that those scoring higher on sexism are more likely to have their masculinity mobilized by the rhetoric of PRR parties. The intersection of sexism coupled with threats to masculinity increase the support of PRR parties. Put more plainly, individuals' level of sexism *moderates* the relationship between their level of masculinity and PRR vote choice. Our hypotheses on the expected moderation effect thus read:

H4: The link between masculinity and populist radical right voting will be stronger among citizens scoring high on sexism compared with citizens scoring lower on sexism.
H4a: The moderating effect of sexism on the link between masculinity and support for populist radical right parties (H4) will hold particularly among men.

Figure 1 illustrates the mediating (H3 and H3a) and moderating (H4 and H4a) effects of sexism on the link between masculinity and PRR voting. As Figure 1 suggests, a mediating effect implies that those who feel very attached to a masculine identity are more inclined to support PRR parties because their sexist attitudes connect them to the discourse, demands and promises of PRR parties and leaders. By contrast, a moderation effect implies that it is only those scoring high on masculinity and who are also heartily sexists who are more likely to support PRR parties.

Case, data, and measurements

We test our hypotheses drawing on the case of Spain. Because of its recent transition to democracy relative to other Western European democracies, Spain has long been considered an exceptional case where PRR parties did not manage to achieve significant institutional foothold. Yet this exceptionalism is on the wane with the growing electoral success of the populist radical right party VOX. VOX entered a (regional) parliament for the first time after the December 2018 Andalusian elections of December
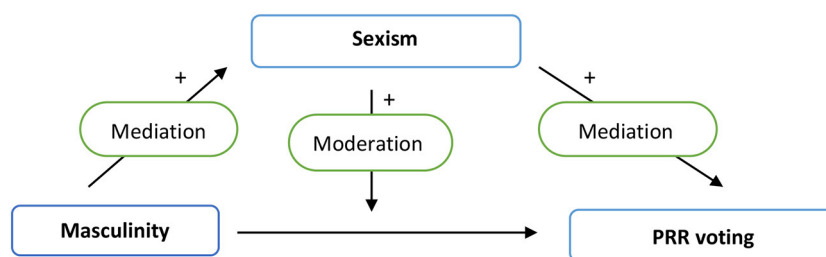
FIGURE 1
Illustration of mediating and moderating effect of sexism on the link between masculinity and populist radical right voting.

2018. This regional election took place after the massive protest event on the International Women's Day of the 8th of March which culminated in the largest general women's strike in recent history in Spain (Campillo, 2019; Jimenez et al., 2022). Since then, VOX's institutional representation has increased both at regional and national levels. The party obtained an unprecedented 52 of 350 seats in parliament in the most recent national elections held in November 2019.

VOX's striking electoral success—and the intense media attention it attracted—has been attributed to an increase in the number of African immigrants arriving in Spain and the territorial issue derived from Catalonia's drive for independence during the autumn of 2017 with the independentist movement provoking a full-fledged national crisis (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Recent studies have also pointed to the relevance of gender-related policy positions of PRR parties. VOX propagates a strong antifeminist message which some have interpreted as a response to the visibility and relevance of feminist protest events such as the historical 8M demonstrations in 2018 and 2019 in Spain (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Anduiza and Rico, 2022; Cabezas, 2022). In fact, VOX denies the existence of gender-based violence and opposes gender violence protection policies. The party also vocally stands against gender quotas or abortion (Alonso and Espinosa-Fajardo, 2021; Cabezas, 2022). There is also convincing evidence that antifeminist and sexist attitudes were key to explaining vote choice for VOX both in the regional 2018 Andalusian elections and 2019 general Elections in Spain (Anduiza and Rico, 2022; Ramis-Moyano et al., 2023).

VOX' anti-gender and anti-gender equality discourse (Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2022) is common among many populist radical right parties which tend to espouse a conservative view on gender (e.g., Norocel, 2013; Akkerman, 2015; Donà, 2020). In addition, the party does share many other characteristics, including its anti-migration discourse, with the populist radical right party family and the party has been labeled as populist radical right in the scholarly literature (e.g., Gould, 2019; Alonso and Espinosa-Fajardo, 2021; Rama et al., 2021). Hence, we believe that our case study is auspicious to test our hypotheses.

To answer our research questions, we rely on an original online survey conducted among a sample that resembles the Spanish voting age population on key socio-demographic characteristics due to the use of quotas for sex, education, age, and region (Fraile, 2023). We relied on an opt-in access panel of the commercial firm Netquest which incentivized all participants with vouchers that can be used later to purchase goods at Netquest's online store. The survey was fielded between 15 and 22 December 2020, about 1 year after the national elections of November 2019. A total of

1,504 respondents were recruited from Netquest's representative web panel, with quota sampling on sex, education, age and region (51, 13.7% women, aged between 18 and 91 years). These quotas ensured that the final sample matched these characteristics in the Spanish population aged between 18 and 92.

Dependent variable

Our dependent variable is a question probing the extent to which respondents would consider voting for VOX. Answer categories range from (0) I will never vote for VOX to (1) 10-I will always vote for party VOX.[2] While the extent to which VOX is a PRR party is a matter of ongoing discussion (e.g., Ferreira, 2019) various scholars have labeled it as such (e.g., Alonso and Espinosa-Fajardo, 2021; Rama et al., 2021). It does share many characteristics of the contemporary PRR party family, including its strong nationalism combined with xenophobia (nativism), its authoritarian view of society, and its attachment to the values of law and order (Ferreira, 2019). The party also strongly embraces traditional values, displayed for example by its frontal attacks against feminism (Rama et al., 2021).

Independent variables

Gender is a binary measure, distinguishing those with their reported gender (0) being a man from those who report (1) being a woman.

To measure *masculinity,* we use an indicator of respondents' *self- assessment of their masculine features* and draw on a rich, century old tradition of scholarship claiming the relevance of masculine and feminine traits for citizens' psyche (Terman and Miles, 1936). In particular, we rely on how masculine individuals feel and capture the masculine sense of themselves. The question asked to what extent respondents feel they have masculine characteristics. The scale ranged between (1) "I have few masculine characteristics" to (10) "I have many masculine characteristics." While this measure of self-reported masculinity is relatively new,

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2   The exact wording is as follows: "Consider the following political parties typically competing in national elections. Could you express the odds that you would vote for each of them?" 0-I will never vote for party X, and 10-I will always vote for party X.

it has been previously used to measure the variation in self-ascribed masculinity (Magliozzi et al., 2016; Alexander et al., 2021a; Gidengil and Stolle, 2021), and has been validated among Swedish respondents (Markstedt et al., 2021).

Figure A1 in the appendix shows that the mean value of masculinity (and its corresponding dispersion) is substantially higher for men compared with women: (men: mean = 7.63, sd = 1.92; women: mean = 3.87; sd = 1.92). This provides evidence of the validity of the indicator in the case of Spain.

Following recent literature, we have chosen a selection of items that tap into both hostile sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1997) and modern sexism developed by Swim et al. (1995). These two families of items —hostile and modern—have been used in research in parallel (for instance, Valentino et al., 2018) and have been shown to display high inter-item correlations indicating that they do not form two distinct dimensions and can be used as a single index (Schaffner et al., 2018). Although these different understandings of sexism are theoretically two-dimensional, empirically, they are too strongly correlated to be considered distinct. We constructed an index we coined with the more general term "sexism" that reflects the broader inclusion criteria we used, integrating items from these two different families. We use the following four survey questions: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with these sentences regarding the current situation of men and women in our society? (i) Currently women are still being treated in a sexist way on television; (ii) Currently there are other social problems far more relevant than gender inequalities; (iii) When women ask for equality what they really want is to get a favor, (iv) Currently women are self-imposing their own limits." Responses range from (0) completely agree to (4) completely disagree. Before summing responses to the four items, we re-coded some of the items so that higher values of the resulting index indicate greater levels of sexism (Cronbach's α = 0.68).

Our control variables include age (in years), education (0-up to primary; 1-secondary, 2-high school; 3-University; 4-Master/PhD), and ideology (0-extreme left to 10 extreme right). Table A1 in the appendix provides an overview of the descriptive statistics—broken down by gender—for all variables included in our analyses.

As our dependent variable is a scale ranging from 0 to 10, the analyses presented below are Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) models. The empirical strategy we deploy is 3-fold. First, we investigate the link between sex, masculinity, and the likelihood of supporting VOX. This set of analyses offers a test for the first and second hypotheses. Second, we examine to what extent sexism explains (at least) part of the empirical link between masculinity and the likelihood of supporting VOX; a test for H3 and H3a (the mediation effect). A final and third set of analyses tests the possibility that sexism moderates the association between masculinity and the propensity to support VOX as suggested in H4 and H4a. All models were tested for the magnitude of multicollinearity. Variation inflation factors (VIF) were all well-below problematic levels.[3]

Results

Gender, masculinity and populist radical right support

Starting with the first set of analyses examining the link between gender, masculinity and support for VOX, Table 1,[4] Model 1—which only includes gender —corroborates the negative propensity of women to vote for PRR parties (in this case VOX) found in the bulk of the literature. When adding masculinity in Model 2, the gender gap remains. Model 2 also shows a link between masculinity and support for the PRR: people who feel they have many masculine characteristics are positively predisposed to vote for VOX. The effect of masculinity remains significant, even once typical antecedents of the support for PRR parties (education, age, and ideology) are controlled for. We find overall a compelling level of support for our first hypothesis. The effect of gender ceases to be significant once both masculinity and our control variables (education, age and ideology) are included in the model. Model 3 also confirms the effect of the typical antecedents of voting for PRR parties: education is negatively associated with the propensity to vote for VOX; the more conservative respondents declare to be, the greater their probability of supporting VOX.

The final model presented in Table 1 (Model 4) adds an interaction term between gender and masculinity to investigate whether masculinity—as suggested in Hypothesis 2—exerts a stronger effect on the likelihood of supporting VOX among men compared with women. The results yield a statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and negative estimate. The association between a masculine identity and supporting VOX is thus conditioned by gender. This suggests that masculinity matters less for women compared with men. To get a better understanding of the substantive meaning of the link between gender and masculinity and support for VOX, Figure 2 plots predicted probabilities of supporting VOX as a function of self-assessed masculinity for both men (presented by the green line with triangles) and women (presented by the red line with circles). The figure clearly illustrates that while masculinity has no impact for women's likelihood of supporting VOX, masculinity is clearly associated with the probabilities of supporting VOX among men. To provide a specific scenario, women scoring low on masculinity (value 2) have a predicted probability of 1.55 to support VOX; women scoring high on masculinity (value 10) exhibit the same predicted probability (1.51). By contrast, men who score low on masculinity (value 2) have a predicted probability of 1.09 to support VOX, compared with 2.49 among men with a high score (10) on masculinity. This suggests a substantial difference of 1.4 (that is to say: 14% points) in the probability of supporting VOX.

As discussed in the theoretical section, we expect sexism to affect the link between masculinity and support for PRR parties, both as a mediator (H3 and H3a) and moderator (H4 and H4a). Considering that the analyses above show that the impact of masculinity on voting for VOX is only relevant for men, we

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3 The highest VIF values are 1.84 for gender in the analysis presented in Table 1, and 1.44 for both sexism and ideology in the analysis presented in Table 2.

4 Total N varies across models presented in Table 1 because we deleted all missing values (refuse and Don't Know) for each of the variables included in each model.

TABLE 1 OLS Regressions supporting VOX.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Woman	−0.79***	−0.45*	−0.29	0.84
	0.16	0.22	0.18	0.43
Masculinity		0.10*	0.06*	0.17***
		0.04	0.03	0.05
Age			−0.01	−0.01*
			0.00	0.00
Education			−0.21***	−0.18***
			0.05	0.05
L/R Ideology			0.67***	0.66***
			0.02	0.02
Woman*masculinity				−0.19**
				0.06
Constant	2.19***	1.46***	−0.56*	−1.33**
	0.12	0.32	0.37	0.45
N	1,231	1,231	1,231	1,231
R^2	0.02	0.02	0.40	0.41

Source: Fraile (2023). Spain December 2020.
Unstandardized OLS coefficient estimates with their associated SE.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

TABLE 2 Testing mediation conditions: prediction of the probabilities of voting for VOX and sexist attitudes among men.

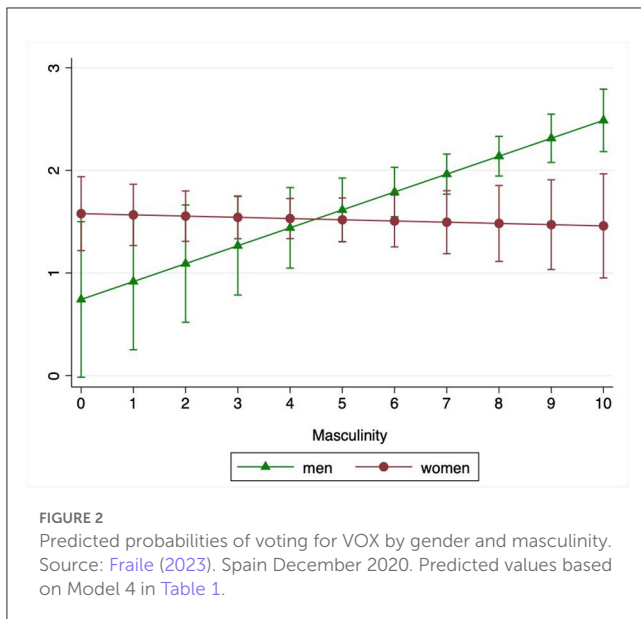|	Model 1 VOX	Model 2 VOX	Model 3 Sexism	Model 4 VOX	Model 5 VOX
Masculinity	0.32***	0.12*	0.23***	0.07	−0.16
	0.07	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.13
Age		−0.01*	0.00	−0.01*	−0.01*
		0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Education		−0.31***	−0.17*	−0.28***	−0.28***
		0.08	0.09	0.08	0.08
L/R ideology		0.77***	0.57***	0.66***	0.65***
		0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
Sexism				0.20***	−0.04
				0.04	0.13
Masculinity*sexism					0.03*
					0.02
Constant	−0.29	−0.90	3.26***	−1.55**	0.12
	0.54	0.52	0.56	0.52	1.01
N	601	601	601	601	601
R^2	0.04	0.44	0.31	0.47	0.47

Source: Fraile (2023). Spain December 2020.
Unstandardized OLS coefficient estimates with their associated SE.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

focus the subsequent analyses solely on men. As a measure of precaution against hasty dismissal, a replication of our analyses for women respondents was performed (see Tables A2, A3 and Figure A4 in the appendix). These analyses confirm that sexism does not play a role when studying masculinity and PRR support among women. Our focus on men also implies that—if we

FIGURE 2
Predicted probabilities of voting for VOX by gender and masculinity.
Source: Fraile (2023). Spain December 2020. Predicted values based
on Model 4 in Table 1.

would find a mediating and/or moderating effect of sexism—
it only holds among men, and thus can only confirm H3a and
H4a which focus on men. We do not find support for H3 and
H4 which suggested a mediating and moderating effect among
all citizens.

Mediating effect of sexism

Starting with a test of H3, which suggests that sexism will at
least partially explain masculine men's tendency to be attracted by
PRR parties, we perform a mediation analysis. Such an analysis
requires two conditions: first, masculinity should be associated
with sexist attitudes; and second, sexist attitudes (the mediator)
should be linked to declared probabilities of supporting VOX
(controlling for masculinity). If these conditions are met, then we
should observe that the size of the association between masculinity
and declared probability of voting for VOX decreases when sexist
attitudes are included in the estimation of declared probability
of voting for VOX. This entails that a percentage of the total
association between masculinity and the declared probability of
voting for VOX is due to the mediation of sexist attitudes.
Table 2 displays the results of this first set of estimations for men
respondents.[5]

Model 1 in Table 2 confirms that masculinity is associated with
voting for VOX. This association remains statistically significant
even after controlling for education, age and ideology (Model
2 in Table 2), although the size of the coefficient (and level of
significance of the effect) of masculinity decreases to a great extent

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[5] Table 2 keeps constant the number of observations included in each
model. Therefore, only participants who provided valid responses to all
variables included in Model 4 are considered for the estimation. This strategy
allows comparison of the size of the coefficient corresponding to masculinity
across equations.

once the control variables are introduced. The next question then
is: To what extent do sexist attitudes contribute to explaining
the greater propensity of masculinity to men's propensity to
vote for VOX? As a first step to answer that question, Model
3 in Table 2 estimates respondents' sexist attitudes. The results
reveal a strong and positive association between masculinity and
sexism. On average a one unit increase in the masculinity scale
is associated with an upsurge in sexist attitudes by 0.23, which
implies a 1.77% of total variation in sexism (ranging from 0
to 13). When we compare average sexist attitudes of a man
with the minimum level of masculinity (0) with another man
showing the highest level of masculinity (10), this entails a 2.35-
point increase of sexist attitudes (or 42% of total variation in
sexism). Interesting to note is also that Model 3 confirms prior
findings showing that sexist attitudes decrease with education
(Archer and Kam, 2020). Ideology is also positively associated
with sexist attitudes: the more right-wing respondents declare
themselves to be, the higher their levels of sexist attitudes. One
unit increase in ideology toward the right is associated with a
0.57 increase in sexism, capturing 4.38% of the total variation in
hostile sexism.

Model 4 in Table 2 tests the second mediation condition and
analyses the extent to which sexist attitudes are, as expected,
positively linked to supporting VOX. The results uncover a
significant and positive link. More precisely, a one unit increase
in sexist attitudes (an index ranging from 0 to 13) is associated
with an average increase in the probability to vote for VOX
(ranging from 0 to 10) of 0.20. One unit increase in sexist
attitudes thus explains about two percentage points of the total
variation in the probabilities to vote for VOX, and a maximum
of 26 percentage points when we compare a man with the
lowest level of sexist attitudes (value 0) with another man
showing the highest level of sexist attitudes (value 13). Model
4 also shows that the size of the coefficient corresponding to
masculinity ceases to be statistically significant when we include
sexist attitudes: from 0.12 (Model 2 in Table 2 and statistically
significant at $p < 0.05$-level) to 0.07 (Model 4 in Table 2 and not
statistically significant).

Taken together, Table 2 confirms that the conditions for the
mediation hypothesis are met and that part of the association
between masculinity and the likelihood of voting for VOX is
explained by sexist attitudes. In order to offer a rigorous test of
the mediation we use Imai et al. (2011)'s approach to partition the
share of the association between masculinity and the probability of
voting for VOX that is channeled through sexist attitudes. More
precisely, we decompose the total effect of masculinity on the
probability of supporting VOX into direct and indirect effects—-
the average direct effect (ADE) and the average causal mediation
effect (ACME), respectively. This approach provides a substantive
measure of the magnitude of the mediation, and shows whether
the mediation is statistically significant, something that the OLS
estimates summarized in Table 2 cannot offer.

Table 3 summarizes the findings of the mediation estimation.
The average direct effect (0.071) depicts the effect of masculinity on
the probability of voting for VOX after controlling for the impact of
sexist attitudes on supporting VOX. The average causal mediation
effect-ACME (0.076) is statistically significant and represents the

TABLE 3 Mediation analysis of the effect of masculinity on voting for VOX via sexist attitudes among men.

Effect	Mean	(95% conf. interval)	
ACME	0.076	0.043	0.116
Direct effect	0.071	0.038	0.180
Total effect	0.147	0.039	0.259
% of total effect mediated	0.509	0.286	1.822

Source: Fraile (2023). Spain December 2020.

TABLE 4 Mediation analysis of the effect of sexist attitudes on voting for VOX via masculinity among men.

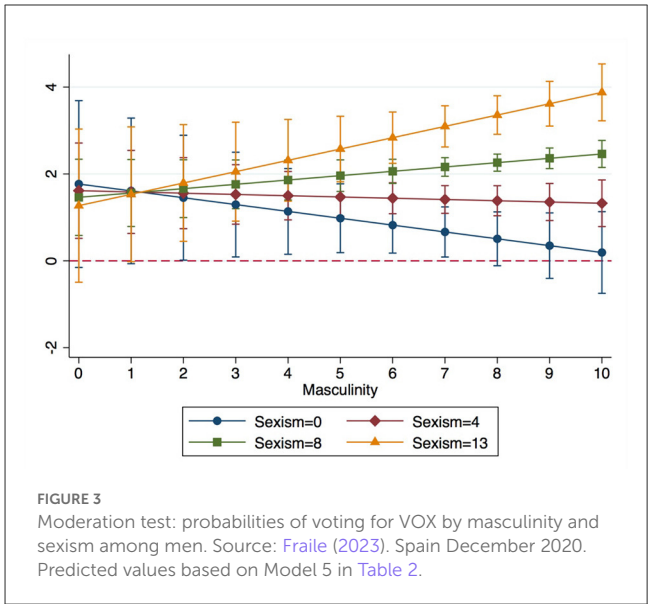| Effect	Mean	(95% conf. interval)	
ACME	0.010	0.004	0.026
Direct effect	0.198	0.123	0.274
Total effect	0.209	0.131	0.285
% of total effect mediated	0.048	0.035	0.077

Source: Fraile (2023). Spain December 2020.

change in the probability of voting for VOX resulting from the differences in sexist attitudes across the masculinity scale. Finally, and most relevant here, from the total effect of masculinity on the probability of supporting VOX (0.147) about half of that effect (0.076) is due to sexist attitudes of men. Put differently: the percentage of the total mediated effect is 51%, denoting how much of the total effect of masculinity on the probabilities of voting for VOX is mediated by sexist attitudes.

One may, however, criticize the causal order suggested in our analyses as it is also plausible that the association between men's sexism and support for PRR parties is due to their masculine identity, as hinted in Barreto and Doyle (2022). To rule out this alternative causal order, we have estimated the reversed mediation by calculating how much of the total association of sexism and support for VOX is due to masculinity (see Table 4). Findings show that from the total effect of sexism on the probability of supporting VOX (0.209) only 0.01 is due to the masculine identity of men. This implies that only about 4.8% of the total effect of sexism of men on their likelihood to vote for VOX is due to their subjective attachment to masculine identity. This evidence further confirms our fourth hypothesis, suggesting that the link between hypermasculine men and voting for PRR parties is mediated by their sexist attitudes (and not the other way around).

Moderating effect of sexism

Having established the presence of a mediating effect, we now move on to testing whether a moderation (or conditional) effect also occurs. As we suggest above (H4a), a moderation effect would imply that sexist attitudes have a different effect among masculine men compared with other men. One may indeed argue that sexist attitudes are more relevant for explaining support for VOX among hypermasculine men—who we know are particularly

FIGURE 3
Moderation test: probabilities of voting for VOX by masculinity and sexism among men. Source: Fraile (2023). Spain December 2020. Predicted values based on Model 5 in Table 2.

attracted by VOX and tend to have high levels of sexist attitudes—compared with other men. If this is the case, then, the association between sexism and the probability of voting for VOX might be greater among hypermasculine men than among other men respondents. Men scoring high on masculinity (but not men scoring low on masculinity) would then report more VOX support as sexism increases.

We test for the presence of this mechanism through a final analysis replicating the estimation of Model 4 in Table 2 and adding an interaction term between masculinity and sexism (Model 5 in Table 2). Figure 3 summarizes the findings of the interaction estimation and shows that the association between masculinity and the probability of supporting VOX is stronger as the level of sexism increases (the coefficient corresponding to the interaction term between hypermasculine men and sexism is 0.03 (0.01) with corresponding $p = 0.051$, see Model 5 in Table 2). We find that hypermasculinity seems to matter especially among men with high levels of sexism. Comparing hypermasculine men (score 10 on masculinity) presenting the lowest levels of sexism (see the blue circle line in Figure 3) with those presenting the highest level of sexist attitudes (see the orange triangle line in Figure 3), we see differences in the probabilities of voting for VOX of around four points. By contrast, masculinity does not make a difference in the probabilities of voting for VOX among men scoring low on masculinity. Thus, when hypermasculine men exhibit high levels of sexism, they are more likely to report support for VOX.[6]

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6 To assess the robustness of the interaction term, we have replicated the estimations summarized in Figure 3 using the command marhis in Stata, which includes a histogram summarising the distribution of the variable on the x-axis in the back. Figure A3 in the appendix plots Average Marginal Effects (AMEs) of masculinity on the probabilities of voting for VOX across values of hostile sexism. It confirms that the average marginal effect of masculinity on the probabilities of voting for VOX is statistically different from zero only for high values of hostile sexism (from 10 onwards). Although we might lack precision in our estimations, Figure A3 suggests that there is

Conclusion

To what extent does masculinity affect support for PRR parties? And how do sexist attitudes relate to the link between masculinity and PRR support? By answering these questions, we aimed to contribute to the current literature on gender and PRR support by overcoming two limitations of existing research. First, the focus in the existing literature on gender through a binary measure and its blindness to gendered personalities and characteristics. Second, the focus in the literature on a reaction against immigration or globalization (e.g., Norris and Inglehart, 2019) when explaining PRR voting and the cultural backlash. Only recently have studies started to look at a complementary explanation: a reaction against gender equality and demands for further improvement of gender equality (Green and Shorrocks, 2021; Anduiza and Rico, 2022; Off, 2023). To the best of our knowledge sexism has not been empirically examined as an explanation for the existing link between masculinity and PRR support. Considering the masculine and anti-gender ideology discourse of PRR parties, we argued that citizens—and in particular men—who score high on masculinity will show the greatest likelihood of supporting PRR parties. In addition, we expected sexism to relate to the link between masculinity and PRR support through two mechanisms: a mediating effect of sexism (sexism explains the link between masculinity and PRR voting) and a moderating effect of sexism (the impact of masculinity is stronger among more sexist citizens compared with citizens scoring low on sexism).

Our analyses, relying on original survey data collected among a sample of Spanish citizens resembling the Spanish voting age population (Fraile, 2023) confirmed these expectations; yet only for men (not women). We acknowledge that observational data does not allow us to establish clear directionality of effects. However, it does allow us to rule out that these attitudes are unrelated to PRR support. Our analysis does show that masculinity and sexism are important drivers of PRR support which provides a more complete picture of the attitudinal basis of support. Men scoring high on masculinity are most likely to support PRR parties. Discovering that masculinity has an important influence on men's preference for a PRR party beyond their self-identification as a man supports a comprehensive model that recognizes the complexity of gender and should encourage scholars to include measures of gendered personalities (masculinity and femininity) in surveys on political behavior. This will allow political behavior scholars to improve the current understanding of people's self-identification as woman or man, gendered personality traits, the link between them, and how they affect political behavior and attitudes.

Our analyses also show that the association between masculinity and PRR support among men can be explained by sexism, confirming a *mediation* effect of sexism. More specifically, we show that around half of the total association of masculinity and vote for VOX among men is mediated by their sexist attitudes. We have also shown that this causal link is stronger than a possible reverse causation (that is, masculinity mediating the association between sexist attitudes and PRR support). But there is more to

it than that: we also find that sexism affects the strength of the relationship between masculinity and the likelihood of supporting the PRR; suggesting a *moderation* effect. Hypermasculine men express an increased likelihood of supporting VOX as their sexist attitudes increase. These findings suggest that communicative strategies of PRR leaders emphasizing signs of masculinity have an impact on men voters' behavior, though only among a specific group of men.

As VOX is commonly labeled as a populist radical right party that uses a rhetoric of threats, and threats to masculinity in particular, which is also seen among other populist radical right parties, similar patterns may be expected in other contexts. Yet, future research could usefully investigate whether similar patterns occur for other PRR parties or instead are conditioned to specific particularities of the context such as the strength and intensity of feminist mobilization, the state of the economy, or the electoral competition that these populist radical right parties might face. Given that research (Mayer, 2013, 2015) on the Front National (currently Rassemblement National) has suggested a small to no gender gap in support for the party since Marine Le Pen took over the party's leadership, it would be interesting to study PRR parties led by women to investigate whether similar effects of masculinity occur within such parties. This is a particularly interesting avenue for further research as PRR parties are increasingly including women leaders (e.g., Marine Le Pen in France, Siv Jensen and Sylvi Listhaug in Norway, Alice Weidel in Germany, and Georgia Meloni in Italy), and with some northern European PRR parties cloaking their campaign against Islam and Islamic practices against women (e.g., forced marriage, honor killings, headscarves) as a call for greater gender equality and tolerance of LGBT rights (Mayer, 2013; Akkerman, 2015; De Lange and Mügge, 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2015).

Furthermore, while masculinity matters when explaining support for PRR parties—at least among men—femininity does not have an impact (see also Coffé, 2019 on the Dutch Party for Freedom). This could be due to the fact that PRR parties demonstrate masculine traits, and thus, men voters who possess those masculine traits are more likely to vote for them. PRR parties' relationship to femininity is less clear (Mayer, 2013; Meret, 2015; Spierings and Zaslove, 2015), meaning that feminine traits do not factor into voters' decisions as to whether or not to support PRR parties. It is possible, then, that more left leaning parties will have stronger feminine traits (or be perceived as such by voters; Winter, 2010) and will therefore be more likely to attract voters—possibly women voters—who themselves possess feminine traits (McDermott, 2016). This opens an interesting avenue for further research, examining the effect of masculinity and femininity—in interaction with gender—on support for parties of different ideological orientations.

Data availability statement

The data presented in the study are publicly available. This data can be found here: GenPsyche-Study1 [DATASET]; DIGITAL.CSIC; https://doi.org/10.20350/digitalCSIC/15251.

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enough variation across the values of the variable hostile sexism to make the calculations provided in Figure 3.

Ethics statement

Author contributions

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The role of sexism in holding politicians accountable for sexual misconduct

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Experimental research on the impact of the #MeToo movement on the evaluation of politicians has focused on how the impact is conditioned by partisan motivation. Beyond partisanship, gender identity and sexist attitudes may also act as a barrier to the success of #MeToo in challenging sexual misconduct in politics. In a conjoint experiment, we examine the extent to which sexism and gender identities (feminine/masculine identity and self-identified gender) condition how individuals respond to politicians accused of sexual misconduct. Respondents were shown two profiles of fictional British male candidates accused of sexual misconduct where the characteristics of the candidate and the scandal were (the number of allegations made, whether they apologized for the misconduct, their partisanship, and their stance on Brexit). We find that in general, more severe misconduct has a more negative impact on evaluations but that respondents who expressed attitudes consistent with hostile sexism were less likely to punish politicians for multiple offenses and less likely to reward a recognition of wrongdoing. Categorical gender identity, whether the respondent was a man or a woman, did not condition the electoral consequences of the scandal and a feminine and masculine identities moderated the impact of the political stance of the candidate. We conclude by discussing the importance of measuring gender attitudes, especially sexism and non-categorical measures of gender identity, in future studies on the political consequences of #MeToo.

1. Introduction

The #MeToo movement, launched by Tarana Burke in 2006, is an intersectional project to support women and girls of color who have experienced sexual violence (Pellegrini, 2018). With the revelations of rape and sexual assault by Hollywood director Harvey Weinstein, actor Alyssa Milano encouraged social media user to adopt the #MeToo hashtag as a rallying cry for victims of sexual misconduct. Following the mobilization of the #MeToo movement, several politicians in the US such as Al Franken (in 2018) and John Conyer (in 2017) resigned due to allegations of sexual misconduct. While these high-profile resignations and legal cases give evidence of the movement's success, some are more cautious about the lasting impact because the focus has been on high profile, celebrity cases and the media has been unduly positive about the impact (Rosewarne, 2019). Beyond these hurdles, sexist attitudes that minimize the experiences of women, could also prevent the movement from changing how we treat perpetrators of sexual assault and those guilty of sexual misconduct (Archer and Kam, 2020).

Much of the research on #MeToo and its political consequences has focused on the United States but we turn our attention to Britain. Awareness of the movement in Britain is reasonably high, with 55% of both men and women surveyed having heard of the movement at the time of our study (YouGov, 2019), and perhaps more significantly, "over half of women aged 18–34, and 58% of young men say they have been more willing to challenge behavior or comments they think are unacceptable" [Fawcett Society, (2018, October 2), p. 1]. Allegations against British MPs followed those in the US in 2017 with Secretary of State for Defense Michael Fallon resigning after being accused of sexual misconduct. Then Prime Minister Theresa May called for a change in procedures for reporting and discipling acts of sexual misconduct. Despite there being high awareness of the movement, less than half (45%) of people believe that the campaign has positively impacted women (YouGov, 2019). Despite this level of support, what types of attitudes may stall progress of the movement, prevent the public from holding guilty politicians accountable or, even, drive a backlash against #MeToo movement? We address this question by considering the role of gender attitudes that endorse negative, traditional, and stereotyped views of women.

We discuss below the potential for sexual misconduct scandals to have electoral consequences for politicians. This review of past research allows us to propose several expectations about how these electoral consequences can be moderated by gendered attitudes. Attitudes about gender, in particular hostile sexism which indicates negativity toward women who violate traditional gender norms, can shape views of politicians and we test below how they condition the electoral consequences of sexual misconduct allegations.

2. Electoral consequences of sex scandals

Political scandals are a regular part of contemporary politics and maintaining political accountability during scandals is a test for a healthy democracy. When political scandals are exposed and the corrupt politicians resign or are turned out by voters, democratic legitimacy is enhanced but the failure to hold these political actors accountable can signal a weakness in democracy. Research does show that when politicians transgress the norms of legitimate and legal behavior, they tend to lose votes (Banducci and Karp, 1994; Maier, 2011) and scandals in general tend to have a negative impact on trust in politicians and political institutions (Bowler and Karp, 2004). Are sex scandals different? Past political sex scandals involving marital infidelity, such as the one involving President to Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky (in 1998), rather than detracting from Clinton's approval coincided with an increase due to a booming economy (Zaller, 1998). Those involved in political or economic scandals are judged more harshly than those involved in moral or sexual scandals, potentially due to the former being more relevant to their job (Doherty et al., 2014). Other evidence suggests that the nature of the scandal, whether in a politician's private or public life, does not seem to make a difference with perhaps the exception of France (Sarmiento-Mirwaldt et al., 2014). However, due to increased awareness and mobilization of the #MeToo movement, the consequences of accusations of sexual misconduct in the political realm are driven by a different partisan

dynamic that has developed over the past 25 years since Clinton and Lewinsky (Holman and Kalmoe, 2021). For example, how victims view sexual consent has evolved. Monica Lewinsky herself reconsidered the consensual nature of her relationship with Bill Clinton to recognize that the power differential between a president and an intern means "the idea of consent might well be rendered moot" (Lewinsky, 2018, para 33).

We build on the partisan motivated reasoning research on the electoral consequences of #MeToo and sexual misconduct allegations to examine the impact of sexual misconduct allegations in Britain. Our primary focus is on how gender attitudes and identity condition responses to sexual misconduct allegations. Specifically, we test whether gender identity and hostile sexism – overtly negative attitudes about women – mitigate the negative impact of allegations by women against male politicians. We examine this moderating effect across four attributes of the sexual misconduct scandal – the candidate's reaction, the severity of the allegations, the time passed and whether the candidate accepts blame. By examining these relationships in Britain, we provide a test of their effect where politics are less personalized. Outside the personalized politics of the US, these types of allegations may have less of an impact. By drawing together the research that has focused on the impact of attributes of sexual misconduct and the research that has focused on heterogeneous effects among study participants, we outline below how the conditioning impact of gender attitudes, such as hostile sexism, might vary across attributes. For example, a respondent whose identity is invested in #MeToo is both more likely to punish but also more likely to respond to outright apologies. On the other hand, those who are likely to dismiss #MeToo accusations because they are inconsistent with one's gender attitudes are less likely to punish but more likely to punish the politician when he denies the allegations.

3. Sexual misconduct allegations: hostile sexism, context and candidate evaluations

While other studies have examined sex scandals, such as Vonnahme (2014) who demonstrates the immediate but unenduring liability of accusations related to an extramarital affair, our analysis centers on sexual misconduct rather than sex scandals in general. Additionally, unlike Barnes et al. (2020) who show that women candidates provoke negative reactions from sexist respondents when engaged in a sex scandal, we limit our analysis to sexual misconduct allegations against male politicians. Table 1 summarizes existing studies about #MeToo allegations against politicians that we build on. In particular, we draw on those studies Barnes et al. (2020) and Costa et al. (2020) – that also question how gender attitudes (e.g., sexism) condition responses to allegations. Below we provide a theoretical framework for examining how gender attitudes and identity shape the way individuals punish (or fail to punish) politicians for sexual misconduct.

We know that some politicians seem to be immune to allegations. For example, despite Trump's sexually violent language this did "nothing to prevent him winning the votes of a majority of white women" (Smith, 2019) with some concluding that the

TABLE 1 Summary of #MeToo experimental studies - candidate behavior, characteristics and heterogeneous effects.

Authors	Design	Candidate behavior/characteristics	Respondent characteristics/ heterogeneous effects
Barnes et al. (2020)	Mturk, US (n = 1106)	GENDER: No impact of gender of political candidate accused of sexual scandal of likelihood of voting (Type of sex scandal not defined in treatment)	SEXISM: Respondents high on hostile sexism more likely to punish women candidates (than male candidates) for involvement in sex scandal. No impact of benevolent sexism.
Brandes (2021) (MA)	US YouGov survey experiment (US, N = 1,200). Vignettes. Varied severity of misconduct and response from politician.	PARTISANSHIP More severe punishment for Democratic politicians. SEVERITY: Harsher punishment (more likely to say should resign) with more severe conduct. Distinction between sexual relationship and unwanted advances/rape.	
Collignon and Savani (2023)	Mturk, US (n = 772) Vignette varied media reporting.	PARTISANSHIP Allegations reduced support.	TRUST Impact of treatment conditioned by social trust.
Costa et al. (2020)	Experiment, Variation in news story. (US, MTurk, n = 2806)	PARTISANSHIP: More punitive for out-party. SEVERITY: Support declines more when sexual misconduct is sexual assault rather than jokes.	SEXISM: Among sexist (hostile) respondents no impact of assault or jokes on favorability of candidate.
Frazier and Kreutz (2019)	Experiment, varied partisanship, MTurk(n = 1000)	PARTISANSHIP: Republican identifiers do not punish accused GOP candidates. GENDER: No impact of gender of political candidate accused of sexual misconduct on likelihood of voting.	GENDER: Women are more likely to punish, equally punish men and women candidates.
Klar and McCoy (2021a)	Vignette, varied gender and partisanship of accuser and accused. (US, Lucid)	PARTISANSHIP: More likely to presume out-party guilty	GENDER: Men less likely to punish in-party. Among those who reflect, more likely to presume in-party candidate guilty.
Klar and McCoy (2021b) (PGI)	2 wave panel, support for Trump after accusations of sexual misconduct		PARTISANSHIP: Democratic identifiers and supporters of #MeToo more likely to punish Trump. Republican women more likely to punish Trump.
Masuoka et al. (2021)	Survey experiment with replication (US) and observational study.		PARTISANSHIP: Democratic women always having lowest level of support for politician accused of sexual misconduct.
McAndrews et al. (2019)	Conjoint experiment (US, n = 525, Australia n = 606)	SEVERITY: Not important in conditioning voter responses. CONTEXT: Greater evidence available to substantiate claims increases willingness to punish.	
Ortiz and Smith (2022)	MTurk sample, observational support for #MeToo		PARTISANSHIP: Stronger partisans more likely to accept sexual assault myths, less likely to perceive as a problem.
Stark and Collignon (2022)	MTurk, US (n = 652) Vignette varied in/out-party.	PARTISANSHIP: Allegation reduce support among both Republican and Democratic Candidates	PARTISANSHIP: Co-partisans less likely to punish their candidate.

Table summarizes findings of recent research on the electoral consequences (i.e. candidate/politician evaluations) of accusations of sexual misconduct.

use of #MeToo as an awareness raising implement has been reasonably well received, but its use as a political tool has been said to be "conspicuously ineffective" (Matthews, 2019). Recent research on the electoral consequences of scandal has been driven by the partisan motivated reasoning framework and examines whether co-partisan candidates are less likely to be punished. The motivated reasoning framework suggests that the desire to reach conclusions supportive of prior attitudes or beliefs may limit or override any accuracy motivations, resulting in accurate information that is at odds with predispositions being diluted, ignored, or even reinterpreted as supportive to the extent that views are strengthened in the face of contradictory information (Kunda, 1990). Thus, when co-partisan politicians are accused of sexual misconduct, this information may be discounted when evaluating the political actor. Research exploring motivated reasoning and #MeToo does shows that partisans are more likely to view politicians from another party as guilty of sexual misconduct (Klar and McCoy, 2021a), partisans are more likely to resist these allegations when evaluating preferred politicians (Klar and McCoy, 2021b), those aligned with parties

on the left are more likely to believe sexual misconduct allegations about politicians (Craig and Cossette, 2022) and this is particularly true among women on the left (Masuoka et al., 2021).

The framework of partisan motivated reasoning draws attention to how partisanship can provide a lens by which to judge politicians accused of misconduct but attitudes about the role of women, one's own experiences of discrimination or gender-based violence and one's own sense of gender are also predispositions shaping attitudes to actors and events that are at the intersection of gender and politics. On the one hand, we can ask whether there are limitations to partisan reasoning (Costa et al., 2020) such that those who hold more gender equal attitudes, for example, may not forgive co-partisans. Or those who hold sexist views will be less likely to punish politicians accused of sexual misconduct. For example, sexist attitudes – held by both men and women – and the salience of gender identity can explain why white women did not punish Trump for his sexualised and misogynistic language (Ratliff et al., 2019).

The research summarized in Table 1 has found that gender relevant attitudes other than partisanship can shape whether voters punish politicians. Support for the #MeToo movement (Klar and McCoy, 2021a; Craig and Cossette, 2022) can increase willingness to punish those accused of sexual misconduct whereas hostile sexism can decrease the willingness to punish (Costa et al., 2020). Collignon and Savani (2023) find that higher motivational values relating to universalism and benevolence increase the inclination to withdraw support from a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. Costa et al. (2020) show that sexism, relative to partisanship, has a strong influence on willingness to punish politicians accused of sexual misconduct and suggest we need to consider gender attitudes such as sexism to understand the impact on #MeToo on the ability of elections to hold accused politicians accountable. We build on the work of Costa et al. (2020) but rather than compare the impact of sexism relative to partisanship we expand the range of gender attitudes examined.

3.1. Hypotheses

Below we detail three gender related factors that we hypothesize will influence the weight given to sexual misconduct in vote choices: gender identity, hypermasculinity and sexism. We develop how gender identity, feminine/masculine identities and sexist attitudes structure responses to sexual misconduct by candidates by providing a legitimizing ideology (Jost, 2019; Barnes et al., 2020).

3.2. Gender identity

There is some research suggesting that women may be more likely than men to judge political candidates harshly when it comes to issues related to sex and gender. One possible explanation for this gender difference is that women may have a stronger sense of empathy and concern for victims of sexual harassment and assault, which could make them more likely to be critical of politicians who are accused of engaging in such behavior. Additionally, women may be more attuned to gender inequality and sexism in society, and thus more likely to be critical of politicians who are seen as perpetuating these problems.

Whilst men can also be victims of sexual harassment, women are significantly more likely to experience sexual harassment and be victims of sexual violence, with the majority of perpetrators being men (UK Parliament, 2018). Estimates by the United Nations are that up to 50% of women in European Union countries have experienced sexual harassment at work (Criado-Perez, 2019), and a study at UK Universities found that 56% of students had experienced unwanted sexual harassment and sexual assault, with 49% of women surveyed stating that they had been touched inappropriately (Batty, 2019). This reality leads to greater resistance among men who are more dismissive of sexual assault claims than women (Szekeres et al., 2020). Attitudinally, men are shown to be more tolerant of sexual harassment than women, which is unsurprising given that women are significantly more likely to be victims of it (Russell and Trigg, 2004). Men also are shown to underestimate the level of sexual harassment experienced by women, with British men underestimating levels by an average

of 18%, with women underestimating also, but to a lesser extent (9%) (Duncan and Topping, 2018). Also, women are more likely to perceive sexual assault as a problem and less likely to believe sexual assault myths (Ortiz and Smith, 2022). Negative statements about the movement by men may reflect gender differences in reactions to the campaign (Kunst et al., 2019). These gender differences demonstrate both greater empathy for women as victims of sexual assault and greater risk of sexual assault. This is likely to translate into punishing candidates more for sexual misconduct than men.

Whereas, Barnes et al. (2020) find that women are more likely to punish candidates for scandals they find that the punishment is harsher for women candidates, theorizing that norm violating women suffer. Democratic women voters always rate House incumbents who have been accused of harassment lower—regardless of whether they share the same party or are from the opposing party. Similarly, women, especially Democratic women, viewed the sexual misconduct of Trump more harshly (Lawless and Fox, 2018).

Here we can also draw on theoretical frameworks such as system justification theory (Jost, 2019) that suggest that individuals may defend existing social, economic, and political arrangements inequalities to reduce dissonance or anxiety. Even if individuals experience personal discrimination, beliefs about social structures can underlie passive acceptance of existing inequalities and prejudice, particularly when challenging the status quo can be costly. In a study on rape culture and willingness to report and punish for rape (Schwarz et al., 2020) find that factors related to the victim (e.g., race, gender, attire at time of attack) and the perpetrators (profession) played an important role. Indeed, research suggests that women are more likely than men to perceive behavior as sexual misconduct (Rotundo et al., 2001), and that men are more tolerant of sexual harassment than women (Russell and Trigg, 2004). This leads to our first hypothesis:

> H1: Those who identify as women will be more likely to punish candidates accused of sexual misconduct.

3.3. Hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity

Recently scholars of gender and politics have recommended moving beyond categorical measures of gender. Self-expressions of femininity and masculinity allow for a more nuanced understanding of how individuals perceive their gender identities. Drawing on social identity theory, individuals who are polarized in their conceptions of their own masculine and feminine traits [i.e., hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity, see Gidengil and Stolle (2021)] are more likely to draw on these conceptions for the basis of attitudes and preferences. Hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity, extreme or exaggerated forms of masculinity and femininity, indicate adherence to rigid gender roles and stereotypes. On the other hand, individuals who are more fluid in conceptions of their own masculine or feminine traits (put themselves closer to the midpoint on both) are likely to draw on core values that reflect this more fluid conception such as such as openness and diversity.

Hypermasculine individuals may feel particularly threatened by social changes that serve to weaken male dominance. Similarly,

hyperfeminine women in their adherence to traditional gender roles might also feel threatened by the decline of the patriarchy. Extant research suggests that these scales demonstrate that femininity and masculinity are good measures of non-categorical gender even though strongly correlated to categorical gender (Gidengil and Stolle, 2021) and are important for understanding variation in important social attitudes, such as those related to social anxiety (Wängnerud et al., 2019). Furthermore, those who have polarized identities – hypermasculine or hyperfeminine – may, in order to reduce anxieties, be more likely to legitimate current structural factors such as women being victims of sexual misconduct. In this way hypermasculine and hyperfeminine identities and attitudes can structure responses to allegations through acceptance of sexual harassment or assault of women as an existing social arrangement. Schermerhorn and Vescio (2022) in a study using the related concept of hegemonic masculinity found that both men and women who endorsed the notion of hegemonic masculinity led to more positive evaluations of Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh and more negative evaluations of the women who made accusations of sexual assault. Drawing on the argument about how the #MeToo movement represents a threat to male dominance, we hypothesize that:

> H2: Individuals with polarized gender identities (e.g. hypermasculine and hyperfeminine) will be less more sympathetic to candidates accused of sexual misconduct.

3.4. Hostile sexism

Hostile sexism is related to a number of attitudes relevant to sexual misconduct such as belief that victims of sexual assault wanted sex (Barreto and Doyle, 2022). Hostile sexism represents antagonistic attitudes toward and beliefs about women, expressed in an obvious and often negative fashion (Glick and Fiske, 1996). It aims to preserve men's dominance over women by underlining men's power and is often resentful toward women who violate what are seen as stereotypical or traditional gender roles (Mastari et al., 2019). Hostile sexism is associated with "greater tolerance of sexual harassment, increased moral disengagement from sexual harassment, and even a higher proclivity to commit sexual assault" (Kunst et al., 2019). Those who endorse hostile sexist beliefs may be less likely to see sexual misconduct as a serious problem or to view victims of sexual harassment or assault sympathetically. Hostile sexism may influence the perception of the perpetrators of sexual assault.

A number of studies have demonstrated how hostile sexism mobilizes support for populist candidates like Trump (Schaffner et al., 2018), policies like Brexit (Green and Shorrocks, 2023) and voting for parties on the right (de Geus et al., 2022). The evidence for the role of sexism in moderating attitudes is not clear cut. Barnes et al. (2020) shows that hostile sexism has a negative impact on evaluation for candidate accused of sex scandals but only if the candidate is a woman. Whereas we only examine sexual misconduct among male candidates, we hypothesize that:

> H3: Those who hold hostile sexist attitudes are less likely to punish politicians for sexual misconduct.

Before moving to a discussion of the data and methods, we briefly discuss the attributes of the sexual misconduct scandal we use in our conjoint experiment. We draw on the research summarized in Table 1 to identify salient attributes about sexual misconduct scandals (candidate behavior and characteristics). Table 1 illustrates on the features of the scandal such as the behavior of politicians, the severity of the allegations and the attitudes of individuals. While our focus is on how gender attitudes moderate the impact of sexual misconduct on holding politicians accountable, we explain our choice of attributes and how they potentially interact with gender. Because we hypothesize that gender attitudes will moderate the effect of them, we briefly describe the reasoning behind each of these attributes.

How politicians respond to the allegations are also important in influencing responses. Schlenker (1980) theory of impression management suggests that people anticipate how their behavior will be seen, and how it will affect others, and then attempt to mitigate those effects, controlling the outcome. This "impression management", denial rather than apologizing, is effective in reducing the negative consequences of allegations of misconduct (Sigal et al., 1988). When accusations of sexual misconduct are easily dismissed, denials of the accusation are seen more favorably in the eyes of the public than an apology and signs of effective impression management (Sigal et al., 1988; Costa et al., 2020). Schlenker (1980) argues that apologies are ineffective because of this dynamic and create negative consequences for politicians accused of scandal (Sigal et al., 1988). Other forms of apology, such as older perpetrators lamenting on the difference in social norms, is another way of apologizing, though again – this does also represent an admission of guilt.

Sexual misconduct can be a strong signal to voters that politicians lack character or are untrustworthy (Doherty et al., 2014). However, these signals can be weak or strong depending on features of the accusations. We examine two in particular: time passed since the events and the severity based on the number of women affected. Studies have shown that the "passage of time is likely to weaken the extent to which voters view the scandal as a signal of the politician's true character" (Doherty et al., 2014, p. 358), and this is particularly true for 'moral' scandals, including those involving sex. The findings on the severity of allegations summarized in Table 1 points to different conclusions. Using a conjoint experiment, McAndrews et al. (2019) find that more extreme accusations (e.g., sexual assault versus comments) do not necessarily reduce electoral support but that more victims does. Brandes (2021) finds that more extreme accusations do indeed attract greater punishment.

Two salient political attitudes in Britain are party affiliation and Leave/Remain support (Hobolt et al., 2021). The vote to leave the European Union in 2016 revealed deep social divides, which didn't follow traditional party lines (Sobolewska et al., 2019). The slim margin, along with the divisiveness of the issue has caused the UK to become "deeply divided on all alternatives to EU membership", with no stable majority for any one approach (Dunin-Wasowicz, 2018). Very few people have changed their minds about Brexit, according to current polling data (Hobolt et al., 2018), and it is considered that Brexit has given rise to new political identities.

As with traditional partisan identities, "these newly formed Brexit identities have consequences for how people view the world" that impact economics, views on prejudice, and that of nationalism (Hobolt et al., 2021).

4. Data and methods

The data used in this paper was collected by an online survey (20–22 May 2019, $N = 1802$)[1] using the Dynata panel targeting a diversity of respondents, representative of the UK as of its 2011 census. We employed a quota sampling method based on age, gender, and region. The online survey was conducted just prior to the 2019 European Parliament election. It was the last European election to be held in the UK before the leaving the European Union on 31 January 2020. In addition to our conjoint experiment, we asked respondents a series of questions about the party preferences, evaluations of government and political attitudes. Our target sample size for the study1 was 1,500 to allow us for a minimum detectable effect size of ~5% for a four-level attribute experiment across five discrete choice tasks. We recruited beyond this minimum sample size, so we are able to detect smaller effect sizes.

4.1. Conjoint experiments

Conjoint experiments, also known as discrete choice experiments (DCEs), are used to measure the value people place on different attributes of a service or products. Conjoint experiments allow researchers to estimate the effects of multiple components at the same time and can closely approximate the real-world behavioral benchmark (Hainmueller et al., 2014). The use of conjoint analysis is a common tool for studying political preferences and "disentangles patterns in respondents' favourability toward complex, multidimensional objects, such as candidates or policies" (Leeper et al., 2020, p. 207). The purpose of this conjoint experiment is to evaluate how people in the UK judge politicians who have been accused of sexual assault, and how this judgment impacts their vote choice and candidate likeability. Through this experiment, we aimed to establish what parameters are important in the judgement of those accused, as well as how dimensions like the gender and partisanship of respondents affected their opinion.

For the experiment, respondents in the online panel were shown a screen with the prompt: "We would now like to get your opinion on hypothetical candidates for political office. We will ask you to choose one of two candidates described. Please read the descriptions of two potential political candidates." They were then shown the profile of two candidates. The two profiles of candidates for the House of Commons, all with randomized attributes, included: date of incident (2 years ago, or 20 years ago), number of women who made accusations of sexual misconduct (one woman, several women), the response of the candidate to the allegations made (apologized stating that "times were different",

apologized stating that "what I did was wrong", and denied the accusations altogether), their stance on Brexit (campaigned to leave, campaigned to remain), and his political party (the Conservative Party, or the Labour Party).

The conjoint experiment allowed for two ways for respondents to show "candidate preference". We asked for a binary choice between the two profiles with the question: "Which of the two candidates you would personally prefer to see elected to the House of Commons?" The second asked respondents to rate each candidate out of 10 ("On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates "not at all likely" and 10 indicates "very likely", what is your likelihood of voting for candidate 1?"), rating their 'likelihood of voting' for each candidate.

Our choice of five attributes about the scandal and the politician is based on a maximum number of recommended attributes. Exceeding six or seven attributes entails an increased cognitive burden put on the respondents, leading to cognitive shortcuts in evaluating profiles and making choices (Kirkland and Coppock, 2018). There are also certain restrictions for the number of levels per attribute, as the more levels are inspected, the larger the sample size should be to detect the statistically significant effects.

Prior to the conjoint experiment, we measured a series of attitudes to test our hypotheses about the moderating impact of gender attitudes.

4.2. Gender and masculine/feminine identities

We use two approaches to measuring gender identity to capture a fuller range of the identities as a single binary measure may not be appropriate for all populations. First, we use self-expressed gender identity using the question: "How would you describe yourself?"[2] Second, we move beyond the categorical measure of gender. Scholars working with survey measures of gender identity have approached the measurement of non-categorical gender with the use of two scales that do not impose stereotypical definitions of femininity and masculinity (Wängnerud et al., 2019).

The question we use is: "We would now like to ask you questions about gender identity. Any one person—woman or man—can have feminine and masculine traits. In general, on each scale, how do you see yourself?" Respondents then assess their characteristics on two scales, one for masculine and another for feminine characteristics. Each scale ranges from 1 = "Not at all feminine/masculine," to 7= "Very feminine/masculine." These are the same scales used by Gidengil and Stolle (2021) to create a

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1 After missing data from non-response on items has been removed our sample size is reduced to 1750.

2 The response categories are: "man", "woman", "transgender" and "Do not identify as male, female or transgender". This question does not allow for an expression of identity outside these categories which does not reflect a more inclusive measure. There were 19 missing responses on the gender identity question which is similar to the missing cases on region. Thus, we are confident non-response on this item does not introduce bias. We rely on the femininity and masculinity scale to capture fluidity of gender because 10 respondents (0.5% of sample) identified as transgender or non-binary. These latter respondents also were missing on some tasks for the conjoint experiment and had to be dropped from the analysis.

bidimensional scale – it contains two different dimensions with each one measured separately and does not assume that femininity is the opposite of masculinity. In other words, respondents rate themselves on both masculine and feminine characteristics and are not given any instructions as to what constitutes "male" or "female" characteristics. From the feminine and masculine scales, we created a categorical measure of polarization in gender identities similar to Gidengil and Stolle (2021). Respondents scoring high on masculinity (6, 7) but low on femininity (1, 2) were coded as "hypermasculine" (*n* = 417, 25%) while those similarly high on femininity and similarly low on masculinity were coded as "hyperfeminine" (*n* = 428. 25%). We then created categories of weak femininity (3, 4, 5 on feminine scale and lower than 3 on masculine scale with *n* = 328, 19%) and the opposite scores for weak masculinity (*n* = 317, 19%). Those who scored themselves at the center on both scales were coded as undifferentiated (*n* = 197, 12%).[3] There is a high correlation between respondent's self-reported categorical gender identity and the bidimensional scale. Among those who identity as women, 49% are hyperfeminine [compared to 45% in Gidengil and Stolle (2021), for example] and 34% as weak feminine. Among men, 51% are hypermasculine and 32% are weak masculine.

4.3. Hostile sexism

There is a battery of items from the ambivalent sexism inventory that measure hostile sexism (Glick and Fiske, 2001). In the survey we asked three items from the hostile sexism index: "*Women who complain about sexual harassment cause more problems than they solve*"; "*For most women, equality means seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men*"; "*Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist*". Respondents are asked to express agreement or disagreement with these items (response categories ranged from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" with "Neither Agree or Disagree" as the midpoint. Respondents were also offered a "Don't Know" option).[4] High scores indicate agreement with the statements, and we take the average agreement with these as a measurement of hostile sexist attitudes. For the analysis we have created three categories. Those respondents who were one standard deviation above the mean on this scale are labeled as *high* on hostile sexism with this one standard deviation below the mean are labeled as *low* on hostile sexism. In our sample, 31% scored high on hostile sexism while 19% scored low on hostile sexism.

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3   Gidengil and Stolle (2021) use the most extreme categories on the scale for their hyperfeminine and hyper masculine categories and have a category of strong identity. We have collapsed their strong and weak into a single category of weak. They have another mid-category of androgynous to reflect those who put themselves above the midpoint on both scales. However, we have placed this in the undifferentiated category to simply the subgroup analysis for the conjoint experiments. Our distributions are roughly are similar to those reported in Table 1 of their study.

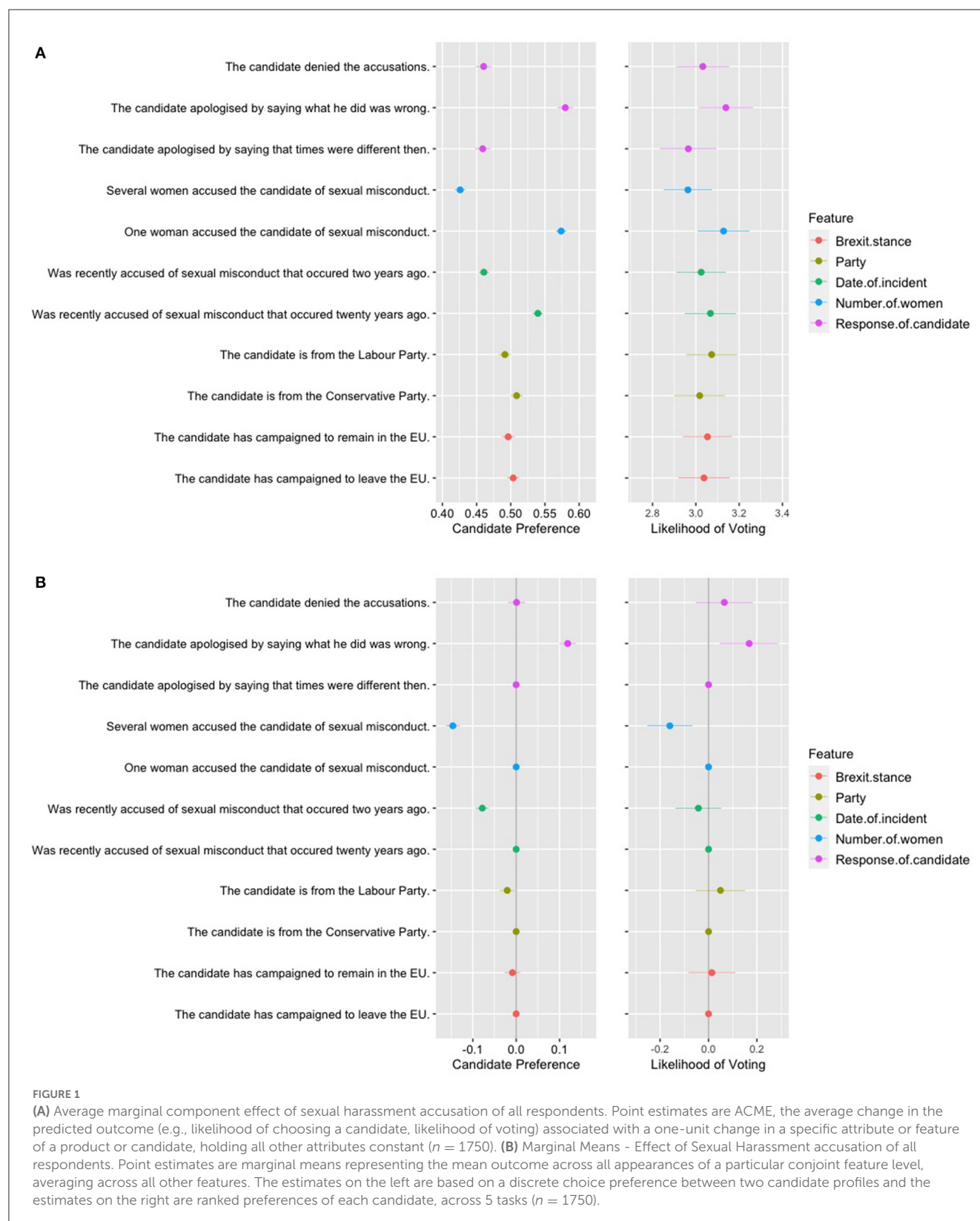4   Those who responded "Don't Know" have been dropped from the analysis.

5. Results

Our analysis proceeds by estimating the overall effect of the attributes and levels from the conjoint experiment analyzing both discrete choices (left panel of figures) and ranking evaluations (right panel of figures). For our analysis of the conjoint experiment, we used the cregg package by Leeper (2020) to calculate both the average marginal component effects (AMCE) and the marginal means. The AMCE can be interpreted as indicators of "causal effect" coefficients. The AMCE is calculated by taking the average of the marginal component effects (MCEs) for each level of an attribute, weighted by the proportion of times that level was included in the experiment. The MCE is the change in preference score associated with a one-unit change in an attribute level, holding all other attributes constant. Thus, the AMCE provides information on the relative importance of each attribute (relative to the baseline category) for respondents and can be used to rank the attributes by importance. The baseline level was the default generated by the estimation procedure.

We also report the marginal means that how the overall favourability of an attribute with the mean support (0 to 1). Marginal means then can provide a descriptive account of the attributes in our sample and give an indication of the mean outcome of an attribute, such that means with averages above the midpoint indicate a positive effect on infection treatment preference and below the midpoint indicates a negative effect. We then analyse the impact of attributes for our subgroups of interests (i.e., gender, polarized gender identities and hostile sexism) to test our hypothesized moderation impact of gender attitudes. For subgroup analysis we rely on estimations of the marginal means. For the subgroup analysis we rely only on the marginal means because they are the preferred method for comparing sub-group differences due to the sensitivity of AMCE to the choice of baseline (Leeper et al., 2020).

Figure 1A shows the average marginal component effects of all respondents, with each point representing. The left-hand graph, shows the results of the binary choice question, "Which of the two candidates would you prefer to see elected?", and the right-hand graph shows the results of the questions 'on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 indicates "not at all likely", and 10 indicates "very likely", what is your likelihood for voting for candidate 1?', with a second identical question asking about candidate 2. The point estimates show the impact of the effect of each value, relative to the baseline category, with a confidence interval of 95 per cent. The baseline comparison point estimates (One woman, Occurred 20 years ago, Apologized – different times, Campaigned to leave, Conservative party candidate) have no confidence interval and are controlled at zero as a comparison for each attribute.

Consistent with our expectations, the severity of the accusations makes a significant difference to evaluations. The "candidate preference" graph, starting with the "number of women", shows that candidates with accusations by "several women" are rated much lower than those with accusations by one woman (baseline), fitting with expectations. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that several women making accusations' gives them more weight and is also a strong signal about the "poor" character of

FIGURE 1
(A) Average marginal component effect of sexual harassment accusation of all respondents. Point estimates are ACME, the average change in the predicted outcome (e.g., likelihood of choosing a candidate, likelihood of voting) associated with a one-unit change in a specific attribute or feature of a product or candidate, holding all other attributes constant ($n = 1750$). **(B)** Marginal Means - Effect of Sexual Harassment accusation of all respondents. Point estimates are marginal means representing the mean outcome across all appearances of a particular conjoint feature level, averaging across all other features. The estimates on the left are based on a discrete choice preference between two candidate profiles and the estimates on the right are ranked preferences of each candidate, across 5 tasks ($n = 1750$).

the accused. For the "likelihood of voting" graph, the result is similar, with accusations by "several women" negatively affecting the respondents vote choice, in comparison to the baseline. Whilst the confidence interval is large for "likelihood

of voting", it is entirely under the baseline, showing a fully negative effect.

Consistent with our hypothesized effects, both graphs in Figure 1A show on average that incidents which happened 2 years

ago impact respondents more negatively than the baseline response of a more historic event of "20 years ago". "Candidate preference" shows that incidents said to occur 2 years ago are more negative (−0.07) than the baseline response of "20 years ago". However, for the "likelihood of voting" graph, the result for "2 years ago" (−0.04) does cross the baseline, giving us the chance that the "20 years ago" response could potentially be more positive when judged on a rating scale. This is also true of the 'likelihood of voting' data, where events "2 years ago" are again, viewed more negatively (−0.04) than "20 years ago" on the baseline. However, with the "likelihood of voting" graph, the confidence interval is wide, crossing the baseline, meaning that like the "number of women", this result is not statistically significant.

However, there are some notable results where our hypotheses are not supported. First, contrary to impression management expectations denials are not more successful in mitigating any negative electoral consequences. Those who apologized and declared they were wrong had greater support both in terms of discrete choice and likelihood to vote. Furthermore, the type of apology mattered. Those who apologized and indicated that times were different where no more successful in mitigating the negative consequences of the allegations than those who denied them. Second, Remain supporters were no more likely to be punished that Leave supporters indicating that there is no strong indication of a negative impact of norm violation. This is not a direct test of the motivated reasoning hypothesis, but we return to a discussion of how gender attitudes can moderate political affiliations such as Brexit support and partisanship.

Figure 1B shows reports the marginal means for the same analysis. The results are similar to the AMCE results in that the more severe allegations and more recent allegations, reduce support for the candidate. Given we have estimates of mean support even for baseline comparisons we can see those who denied allegations or apologized saying times were difference are equally punished relative to an apology where the is an admission of guilt. It is important to recognize that in modeling the likelihood of voting for each of the accused candidate, i.e., the ranking of each candidate profile, the marginal mean does not pass the 0.50 threshold or the midpoint of the scale. Thus, in the experiment, there is overall a very low likelihood of voting for candidates who have been accused of any sexual misconduct and we view the forced choice between the two profiles is really a choice between two candidates where there is a low likelihood of voting for either.

We next move to our subgroup analysis. Figure 2 shows the marginal mean estimates from the conjoint analysis, subset by respondent gender (H1). The left-hand graph, shows the results of the binary choice question, "Which of the two candidates would you prefer to see elected?", and the right-hand graph shows the results of the questions "on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 indicates 'not at all likely', and 10 indicates 'very likely', what is your likelihood for voting for candidate 1?", with a second identical question asking about candidate 2. The two points, are shown in blue for women and red for men. To summarize the hypothesized expectations, women who are more likely to have great personal experiences of sexual misconduct or feel more threatened, are more likely to be impacted by the attributes about the severity and recency of the accusations. Multiple allegations increase the chance that the
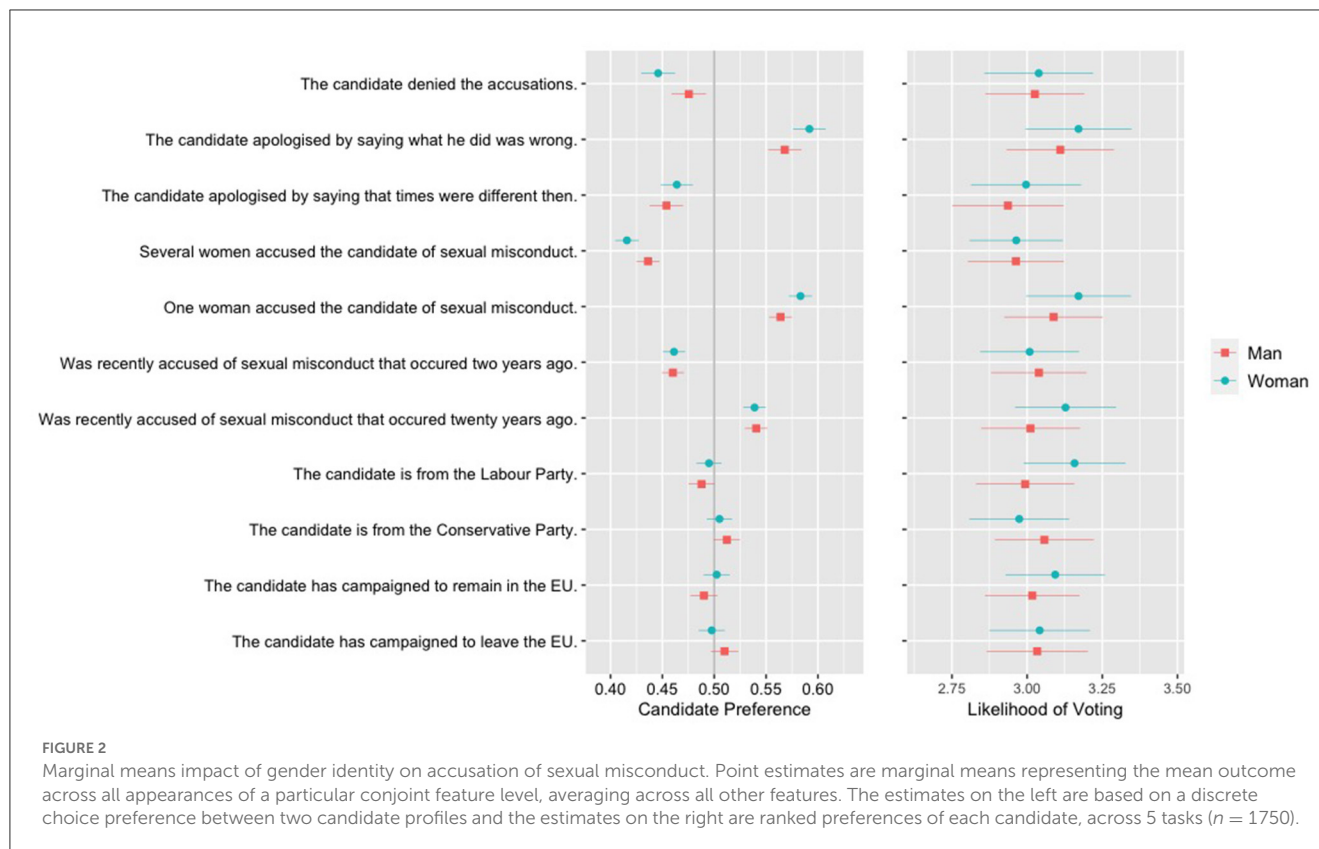
allegations are true and hence they may be more sensitive to these accusations. We also hypothesize that they also are more negatively impacted by attempts by the candidate to manage impression through the denial of accusations.

Consistent with our expectations, in terms of "candidate preference", accusations by "several women" have a more negative impact for women than men. However, these same differences are not evident for the recency of the event. Contrary to expectations women are not more sensitive to recency of the event or the candidate's response. Men and women are equally likely to hold politicians accountable (punish) for allegations from 2 years ago and, even though women have a lower level of mean support than men for those who denied the allegations, these are not statistically significant differences. The subgroup differences in rating the likelihood of voting for each accused candidate shows very similar results for both men and women. As in Figure 1B, the lack of statistically significant differences between subgroups also reflects that there is a low level of support among all respondents with little variation.

Figure 3 tests for subgroup differences among polarized gender identities (H2). We expected that those with hypermasculine and to a lesser extent, hyperfeminine identities would be less impacted by the accusations. We find some limited evidence in that those with weak feminine identities are more negatively impacted by the candidate denying the accusations. However, there are no significant differences across the number of women making the accusations or the timing of the events. We do, on the other hand, see evidence of differences on the political characteristics of the candidates. Hyperfeminine and hypermasculine are resistant to the negative consequences of accusations for Conservative party candidates for those who have campaigned to leave the EU. Those with weak feminine identities are more positive about Labor party candidates and those who campaigned to remain in the EU. Thus, we see some differentiation among the types of attributes and how they are moderated by gender attitudes. Polarized gender identities are conditioning the political attributes of the candidates rather than the attributes of the sexual misconduct itself in terms of preferred candidates. We come back to this point in the discussion to consider the links between polarized gender identities in the context of partisan motivated reasoning.

The marginal means for the likelihood of voting for each accused candidates are displayed in the lower panel of Figure 3. The results displayed here are the opposite of what we expected. Those with more polarized gender identities are less likely to vote for each candidate regardless of political attributes or the attributes of the accusations. Those with weak identities have higher rankings than those with polarized identities but lower than those that we have labeled as having undifferentiated identities. This is completely unexpected where even for the political attributes we see the same differences among the categories of gender identities. We discuss in the conclusions how this may possibly reflect negative attitudes about all candidates among those who polarized identities.

Finally, Figure 4 shows the results from the test of subgroup differences by hostile sexist attitudes (H3). Unlike gender identities, we do note difference here with, in general, those holding sexist attitudes being less likely to be impacted by the accusations. For candidate preferences (the left panel), those

FIGURE 2
Marginal means impact of gender identity on accusation of sexual misconduct. Point estimates are marginal means representing the mean outcome across all appearances of a particular conjoint feature level, averaging across all other features. The estimates on the left are based on a discrete choice preference between two candidate profiles and the estimates on the right are ranked preferences of each candidate, across 5 tasks (*n* = 1750).

with low levels of hostile sexism prefer candidates who have apologized and said what they did was wrong whereas those who have scored high on the hostile sexism index prefer those who have apologized by saying times were different. For those low on hostile sexism there are no differences though between denying and apologizing with times were different. Interestingly, the baseline effects in Figure 1 showed that apologies and accepting responsibility were more effective in maintaining support than denials and this was counter to expectations from impression management theory. However, in the discrete choice results in Figure 4 we see that this apology is less effective among those with hostile sexist attitudes. Therefore, impression management may only be effective for those high on hostile sexism because the impression being managed is more consistent with patriarchal views.

Sexist attitudes also significantly moderate the severity and recency of the accusations. For example, for those who are high on hostile sexism the number of women making the accusations makes less difference to preferences than for those low on sexism. Those who are low on sexism have a much higher preference for those candidates who were accused of sexual misconduct by one woman. A similar pattern is evident for the when the incidents happened. The timing of the event does not distinguish preferences as strongly for those with high levels of hostile sexism whereas for low hostile sexists the date of occurrence has a stronger relationship to preferences. Again, these results indicate sexist attitudes moderate preference choices across severity, recency, and candidate response.

The impact of the political attributes of the candidates, their partisanship and Brexit position, are to some extent moderated by

sexist attitudes. Those with low levels of sexism, relative to those in the mid and high categories of hostile sexism, are less likely to prefer the candidates from the Conservative party and those who campaigned to remain.

The pattern for the moderating impact of sexism on the likelihood of voting for each candidate is similar to the other models tested rankings of candidates in that the attributes are not conditioned by the gender attitude. However, the pattern is dissimilar in that sexist attitudes impact where respondents will vote for a candidate accused of sexual misconduct in general. Those who score high are the hostile sexism scale are more immune to the allegations than are those who are in the middle of the scale and much more than those who score lowest on the hostile sexism scale. Those respondents lowest on the hostile sexism scale have the lowest mean probability of voting for each candidate accused of sexual misconduct regardless of the attributes of the candidate or the scandal. This demonstrates that hostile sexism lessens the ability of candidates accused of sexual misconduct to be held accountable.

6. Conclusions

The ability to maintain accountability is central to democratic legitimacy. Drawing on the strength of conjoint experiments we examined five attributes of sexual misconduct scandals about the political dispositions of the candidates and the characteristics of the scandal itself – to examine how these impact voters' willingness to hold politicians accountable. Work on political scandals have found that partisan motivated reasoning might

FIGURE 3
Marginal means impact of polarized gender identities on accusation of sexual misconduct, subset by levels of feminine and masculine identities. Point estimates are marginal means representing the mean outcome across all appearances of a particular conjoint feature level, averaging across all other features. The estimates on the left are based on a discrete choice preference between two candidate profiles and the estimates on the right are ranked preferences of each candidate, across 5 tasks ($n = 1750$).

FIGURE 4

Marginal Means Impact of Accusation of Sexual Misconduct on Candidate Preferences, subset by levels of hostile sexism. Point estimates are marginal means representing the mean outcome across all appearances of a particular conjoint feature level, averaging across all other features. The estimates on the left are based on a discrete choice preference between two candidate profiles and the estimates on the right are ranked preferences of each candidate, across 5 tasks ($n = 1750$).
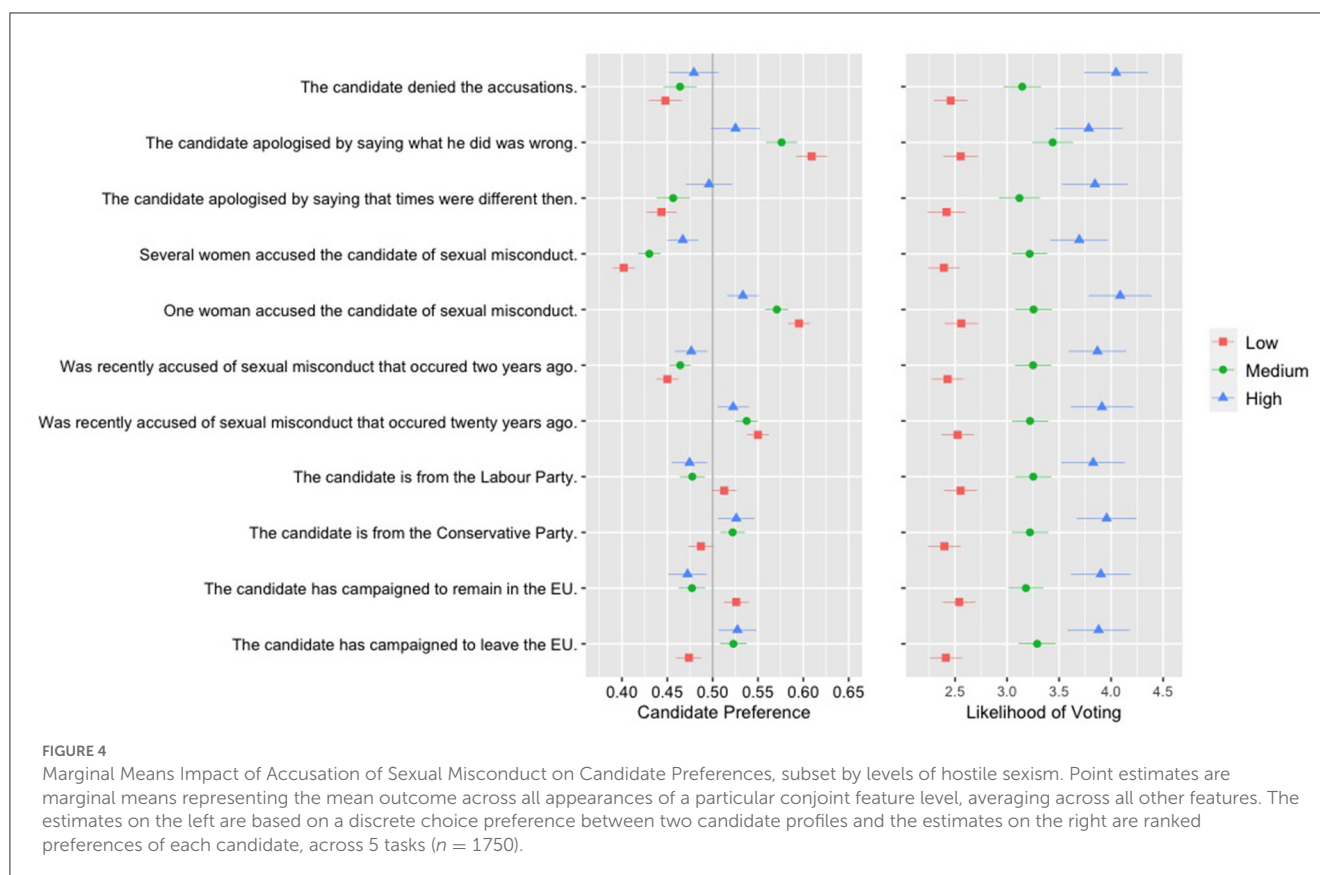
provide a limitation to whether voters hold politicians accountable. Our main focus in the conjoint experiment is to examine whether negative attitudes about women can moderate the ability of citizens to hold politicians accountable for behavior that is damaging to women. We recognize that men are also the victims of misconduct but in this study we have limited our analysis to perpetrators who are men and vitcims who are women.

Overall, the results of our conjoint analysis are consistent with other experiments looking at similar questions in that we find the severity of the allegations matters – more victims increase willingness to punish. Apologies matter but contrary to expectations from impression management apologies and accepting behavior was wrong increases preferences for a candidate relative to denial of the accusations. Generally, we find also, and this is contrary to studies that examine other types of scandals, that apologies make a difference. It does not seem to be an effective strategy for politicians to deny the allegations. Perhaps our results here – that accepting blame for doing something wrong – reflects the impact of the #MeToo movement on how people consider these allegations when calculating voting decisions (at least under hypothetical and experimental conditions). In terms of accountability, this finding suggests that while variations in the type of allegation can be a signal about poor character, apologizing and admitting to wrongdoing can also be a strong positive signal about character.

The answer to the question on whether the electoral consequences of sexual misconduct scandals are moderated by gender attitudes is that it depends, the type of gender attitude and the attribute. Hostile sexism was a strong moderator of attributes. Largely, those high on hostile sexism were more immune to the attributes of the scandal than those who were low on hostile sexism. These findings reflect the growing body of evidence that sexism can be a foundational attitude in the dynamics of political preferences. Similar to studies that have found sexism to drive US presidential choice (Ratliff et al., 2019) and partisan preferences in Britain (de Geus et al., 2022). It is also important to reiterate the point that those who would hold hostile sexist attitudes were less likely to punish candidates in general. That we find these strong effects for sexism and no moderating impact of gender identity suggests negative attitudes about women rather than the attitudes of women are more salient in explaining resistance to holding politicians accountable in the #MeToo era.

Finally, it is important to recognize where the type of attribute did make a difference to whether gender attitudes moderated the impact of the sexual misconduct. For the most part of the bidimensional measure of feminine and masculine identity did not moderate the impact of the scandal except when it came to the political attributes of the candidates. Those with more polarized, sex typical identities (i.e., hypermasculine and hyperfeminine) were less likely to punish Conservative and Leave supporting candidates. Thus, we see how acceptance of sexual

misconduct can be tolerated for politicians who hold right wing views or are consistent with a strong state – views that would be consistent with defending a traditional patriarchal society. Without the use of the bidimensional scale we would have concluded that gender identity has no moderating impact as there were no significant differences using the categorical measure of gender identity. Given that polarized gender identities can prevent the exercise of electoral accountability to further maintain patriarchal norms in politics, further studies on sexual misconduct scandals specifically and other political policies that challenge traditional gender roles should incorporate this bidimensional measure of gender identities.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, upon request, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the University of Exeter, Social Sciences, and International Studies. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

BL contributed to research design, analysis, and writing. SB contributed equally to design, analysis, and writing. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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